

"These reports, which have not been rebutted by the bureau, suggest that your personal political ambitions may be informing decisions you are making regarding what is supposed to be a nonpartisan and objective agency rulemaking process governed by the Administrative Procedure Act," Hensarling wrote.

Of particular concern to Hensarling are reports that Cordray has been expediting the bureau's work on new payday lending rules, including reportedly getting personally involved in rulemaking and setting up a "war room" for the final push not far from his office.

"Simply put, there is no valid legal basis for accelerating a federal rulemaking to satisfy an arbitrary deadline necessitated by election dates established under Ohio law," Hensarling wrote.

Hensarling and the conservative advocacy group America Rising Squared have both sought reviews of whether Cordray has violated the Hatch Act, which prohibits federal employees from politicking while on duty. The allegations have not resulted in any findings.

Cordray served as Ohio's treasurer from 2007-2009 and as its attorney general from 2009-2011. He lost a re-election campaign to the state's current attorney general, former Republican Sen. Mike DeWine, by less than 2 percentage points in a year when most other statewide Democratic candidates did much worse. Obama appointed him to lead the consumer agency in 2011.

Hensarling expressed disappointment with Cordray's reply to his query, calling it a refusal to be transparent.

"If he intends to serve his full term, there is no reason not to say so," he said. "The only reasonable conclusion is that he therefore harbors partisan political ambitions, which calls into question the propriety of all of his recent and future actions as CFPB Director."

Cordray will be joined Monday in Cincinnati by Democratic state Rep. Alicia Reece, a civil rights advocate and former vice mayor whom some view as a possible running mate.

Fentanyl drives another record year of Ohio overdose deaths

Today

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — An average of 11 people died each day of drug overdoses last year in Ohio, officials said Wednesday as they reported yet another grim milestone in the state's addictions epidemic.

A record 4,050 people died of drug overdoses in 2016, with fatalities driven in large part by the emergence of stronger drugs like the synthetic painkiller fentanyl, the Health Department said. Overdose deaths rose 33 percent over the 3,050 deaths in 2015.

Compounding the problem was the appearance of drugs like carfentanil, an opioid so powerful it's used to sedate elephants, and the lacing of drugs like cocaine with fentanyl.

The state says heroin-related deaths are leveling off, and deaths from prescription painkillers fell for the fifth straight year.

The prescribing of painkillers also is falling, an important step to reducing overall addiction rates, said Dr. Mark Hurst, medical director of the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services.

"This progress is significant because prescription opioid abuse is frequently a gateway to heroin and fentanyl use later on," Hurst said.

More than half the overdose deaths in 2016 involved fentanyl, compared with 40 percent last year and 20 percent in 2014.

Despite numerous state efforts to address the epidemic, it shows little signs of slowing. Cuyahoga saw 547 deaths this year, but officials there already are predicting the state will see more than 700 deaths once 2017 figures are tallied.

The Franklin County coroner said earlier this year the county had 173 overdose deaths through April, a 66 percent jump from the same period a year ago.

The Columbus Dispatch
Ohio's Greatest Online Newspaper

Ohio records 4,050 drug deaths, up 33 percent from 2015

Posted at 12:01 AM, Updated at 6:04 AM

Fatal drug overdoses keep spiraling in Ohio, with the powerful opioid fentanyl fueling a record 4,050 deaths last year — 1,000 more than in 2015.

Despite increased state spending, legislation and debate on Ohio's drug crisis, last year's death toll was 33-percent higher, according to the annual report on unintentional drug overdose deaths released Wednesday by the Ohio Department of Health.

The report hit hard with Tonda DeRe, a Carrollton, Ohio, woman who lost her daughter, Holly Noel Jenkins, to a heroin overdose in 2012. She since has formed a support group, Holly's Song of Hope, and testified before Congress.

"I pulled up that report and my stomach just tossed," she told The Dispatch. "I just saw 4,000 Hollies, 4,000 sons and daughters of Ohio. That's a jet airplane out of the sky and nothing's being done about it."

"We've got to stop messing around and get more treatment," DaRe said. "We need more treatment."

While deaths from heroin stayed about the same last year at 1,444, deaths attributable to fentanyl, the deadly synthetic opioid 50 times stronger than heroin, shot up, accounting for 58.2 percent of deaths, up from 37.9 percent in 2015. There were 3,050 overdose deaths in all of 2015, a figure that led the nation.

The prime victims of fentanyl, much of which is illegally imported from China, were ages 25 to 34, with more male than female victims, the report showed.

There was an improvement in the number of deaths from prescription opioids, which were at the lowest level since 2009, according to the report. The total number of opioids dispensed to Ohioans dropped by 162 million doses, 20.4 percent, between 2012 and 2016. New prescription limits begin Thursday.

But cocaine-related overdose deaths skyrocketed nearly 62 percent, from 685 in 2015 to 1,109 in 2016. Coroners' reports indicated that the death toll increased because opiates, including fentanyl, are being mixed with cocaine, rendering a deadly combination.

"The continued increase in opioid-related deaths reaffirms that we still have much work to do, but Ohio is seeing important progress in reducing the number of prescription opioids available for abuse and prescription-related overdose deaths," said Dr. Mark Hurst, medical director of the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. "This progress is significant because prescription opioid abuse is frequently a gateway to heroin and fentanyl use later on."

Franklin County recorded 314 deaths, third highest in the state, up from 279 in 2015. Cuyahoga was highest at 547, up from 275 the previous year. while Montgomery was second most deadly with an increase from 320 to 239, the report showed.

Largely rural Holmes County, one of only two counties to have no deaths in 2015, recorded four fatal overdoses last year.

Tracy Plouck, director of the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, acknowledged the higher death toll is disappointing. She added, "This is not something that unfolded overnight and it's not something we can remedy overnight."

Asked if the state should declare an emergency in response to the drug crisis, Plouck said, "We have treated this as an emergency for the past six years. I don't know that declaring an emergency would allow us to do anything different tactically."

Jon Keeling, spokesman for Gov. John Kasich, said, "Preventing addiction in the first place is a priority, and we're making progress there, but we have a ways to go ... We have to convince our young people and those that struggle that they have a purpose in their lives and that the use of drugs will destroy it and all the good that they can do in their lives."

Angela Sausser, executive director of the Public Children Services Association of Ohio, said the crisis is fueling the numbers of children without homes. "As Ohio continues to be devastated by rapidly increasing numbers of opioid overdose deaths, the children services system is experiencing similar climbs in the foster care population. Ohio's foster care population grew by 10% in just one year to over 15,000 children. Compared to 2010, 22% more Ohio children are in foster care today."

Lori Criss, chief executive officer of the Ohio Council of Behavioral Health & Family Services Providers, said, "Ohio's addiction epidemic has surged to unthinkable proportions. Current efforts are falling woefully short. It's time to turn the state's full attention to the prevention and treatment of substance use disorders."

State Sen. Joe Schiavoni was blunt. "It makes me sick," the Boardman Democrat said. "Almost every community says they are the epicenter because that's the way they feel. The fact that the problem is getting worse shows that what we're doing isn't working."

Cheri Walter, chief executive officer of the Ohio Association of County Behavioral Health Authorities, observed, "Bad as the the 2016 numbers are, if not for efforts against the epidemic, fatalities would have been much worse. "Fentanyl just changed the game. "The bottom line is that the people who are dying are in their 20s, 30s and 40s."

The Kasich administration said it is investing about \$1 billion each year in the drug fight, much of it through the Medicaid expansion for drug addiction treatment. Other efforts include using the overdose-reversing drug naloxone, investing in drug courts, providing housing for addicted Ohioans, and increasing

illegal drug seizures. Kasich also proposed up to \$20 million to support new scientific breakthroughs in fighting drug abuse through the Third Frontier Commission.

Dispatch reporters Catherine Candisky, Randy Ludlow and Marty Schladen contributed to this story.

Cordray keeps mum on Ohio governor bid

Posted at 5:46 AM, Updated at 5:58 AM

WASHINGTON — Former Ohio Attorney General Richard Cordray on Wednesday tartly dismissed Republican calls to declare whether he would run for governor next year, telling a House GOP committee chairman that he has no more news on the subject.

As reports circulated that Cordray would resign his post as director of a federal consumer protection bureau to seek the Democratic gubernatorial nomination, he would not say whether he would serve out his five-year term, which expires in July.

In a letter to House Financial Services Committee Chairman Jeb Hensarling, Cordray brushed aside a demand by the Texas Republican on whether he would serve out his term as director of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, writing that it was the third time the chairman had asked the question and “my answer remains the same.”

“At this time, I have no further insights to provide on that subject,” Cordray wrote.

Even as Cordray sent his response, the CFPB website noted Cordray is scheduled to speak on Sept. 7 before a credit union organization — a scheduling move seemingly at odds with reports that he’ll announce his gubernatorial bid at a Labor Day event in Cincinnati.

Consumer Finance Monitor reported that Cordray had altered his schedule on the bureau’s website to announce that he would give remarks at the meeting of the Credit Union Advisory Council. The notice had originally indicated that the agency’s deputy director would be giving remarks.

Hensarling has emerged as a key and vocal critic of Cordray, essentially becoming a spokesman for Republican concerns that Cordray’s bureau is too powerful and is structured in a way that lacks congressional oversight.

On Monday, Hensarling sent a letter to Cordray demanding to know by Wednesday whether Cordray planned to run, citing news reports that “suggest that your personal political ambitions may be informing decisions you are making” as head of the agency.

Federal law prohibits Cordray from even discussing future political plans. He would have to step down as head of the bureau to run for governor.

On a conference call this summer with Sen. Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio, Cordray deflected questions about politics, saying that he would discuss only his work as head of the U.S. Consumer Financial Protection Bureau.

As Democrats wait for Cordray to decide, four other Democrats are raising money and hiring campaign staff: former state Rep. Connie Pillich, state Sen. Joe Schiavoni, former U.S. Rep. Betty Sutton and Dayton Mayor Nan Whaley.

Kasich hopes pain-pill limits will reduce opioid addiction

Posted at 6:24 AM, Updated at 6:24 AM

Ohioans and their medical-care providers face stricter limits on pain-pill prescriptions beginning Thursday as the state seeks to choke off abuse leading to opioid addiction.

Likening opioid pain prescriptions to a "loaded gun," Gov. John Kasich said the restrictions hold the promise of preventing abuse and keeping excess pain pills off Ohio's streets.

The new requirements prohibit doctors, dentists and others from prescribing more than seven days of opioids — five days for minors — for treatment of pain.

Refills can be prescribed only if physicians and others document the need for extending pain-relief medication.

Medical-licensing and pharmacy boards are monitoring the prescribing of opioids with an eye toward cracking down on medical professionals who prescribe opioids without medical justification.

"You violate these guidelines and the medical board will come after you," Kasich said of physicians who could face the loss of their licenses.

The limits do not apply to opioids prescribed for cancer, palliative care, end-of-life care and medication-assisted treatment for addiction.

The heads of the medical, nursing and pharmacy boards all joined Kasich in saying the new limits will help Ohio rein in an out-of-control opioid crisis that kills thousands each year.

"There is some light shining through right now," Kasich said. Voluntary prescribing guidelines have cut the number of overdose deaths from opioid prescriptions from 667 in 2015 to 564 in 2016, he said.

Also, the number of opioid prescriptions have dropped by 20 percent, or 109 million doses, since 2012, said Dr. Mark Hurst, medical director of the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services.

State officials say 74 percent of those who died from drug overdoses in 2015 previously had received legally prescribed opioids.

Kasich said the number of deaths from heroin also is leveling off, but cautioned, "We're not out of the woods." Fentanyl, a powerful man-made opioid, increasingly is killing more Ohioans as it is laced into cocaine and other drugs, the governor said.

The governor spoke Thursday before the state's 2016 unintentional drug-overdose death total — 4,050, an increase of 33 percent from 2015 — was announced. Fentanyl and its derivatives were responsible for 58 percent of deaths, up from only 4 percent in 2013.

A federal grant will help pay for a campaign called "Take Charge Ohio" that will begin in October and seek to educate medical professionals and patients about alternatives to pills to treating pain.

The Kasich administration says Ohio spends \$1 billion a year to fight opioids, with about two-thirds of that coming from Medicaid coverage of drug-addiction treatment for poor Ohioans. The legislature added nearly \$180 million of additional funding in the new two-year budget.

Kasich continues to defend his expansion of Medicaid to more than 700,000 additional Ohioans to help combat drug addiction.

"Think about where Ohio would be ... if we hadn't expanded Medicaid. To kind of keep debating this and wringing our hands because we got some right-wingers somewhere who want to kill this program ... if we cut this money off, if you take this money away, you will not have the resources needed."

Republican Mike Gibbons to air first TV ads of Ohio's US Senate race

Posted at 5:43 AM, Updated at 5:43 AM

In an attempt to raise his visibility, Cleveland banker Mike Gibbons plans to air the first television ad of the 2018 U.S. Senate race during the opener of the Ohio State football season Thursday.

Gibbons is vying for the Republican nomination against Ohio Treasurer Josh Mandel. The winner will run against Democratic Sen. Sherrod Brown.

Titled "Serve the People," Gibbons ad decries the state of things in Washington.

"We're in serious trouble right now," Gibbons says. "And if we do not change things, our prospects are not very good. We got here because the way Washington works. We have professional politicians who really don't even understand the issues with few exceptions."

As he talks about what's wrong with Washington, photos of Brown, House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif. and Sen. Bernie Sanders, D-Vt. appear on the screen.

None have been in the majority since the beginning of 2011.

Jerry Springer said to be testing run for Ohio governor

Posted at 12:01 AM, Updated at 5:58 AM

TV talk-show host Jerry Springer is seriously assessing a run for the Democratic nomination for Ohio governor and soon will decide, said two state legislators who met with him last Thursday.

Springer met at the Cleveland Heights home of Democratic state Rep. Janine Boyd, she said Wednesday. Also present were Sen. Sandra Williams and Rep. Stephanie Howse, both Cleveland Democrats.

The former Cincinnati mayor has been holding meetings around Ohio to discuss a possible run in 2018, Williams said.

Springer, 73, has flirted in the past with running for governor. His national celebrity status generated by his show makes him easily identifiable to the public, and his wealth enables him to partly fund a campaign.

In the past, a show such as his that sometimes features cheating spouses and other controversial fare had been seen as a possible drawback to a political campaign, but that might be less of an issue now that former reality-TV star Donald Trump is in the White House.

Springer's "problem last time was that his TV program was a bit extreme," Williams said. "Jerry Springer extreme may be the norm of today."

Springer said he had been working with consultants and has done polling that puts him ahead of other Democratic gubernatorial candidates, Williams said.

"He's gotten a sign-off from his family," Williams said. "The only thing he has to do is decide if he's running."

If Springer does run, he'll join a Democratic field that includes state Sen. Joe Schiavoni, D-Boardman; Dayton Mayor Nan Whaley; former U.S. Rep. Betty Sutton and former state Rep. Connie Pillich. Richard Cordray, a former Ohio attorney general who is director of the U.S. Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, might enter the race; he would have to step down from his federal post to announce a run.

Williams said she doesn't have a favorite in such a crowded field.

House Minority Leader Fred Strahorn, D-Dayton, also is waiting to pick a horse to back. "We want to see them go through their paces first," Strahorn said Wednesday.

Strahorn and Williams said that the next election cycle is critical to Democrats and that it's important for the party to coalesce around the right candidate.

"The middle-class working person has been taking it on the chin," Strahorn said. "It's got to be about them."

Boyd said that although she has connections to other candidates in the field, she would back Springer if he jumps into the race, and the reason is not his celebrity.

"I'm not a fan," she said of his show. "I'm interested in people who care about this state."

On the Republican side, Attorney General Mike DeWine, Lt. Gov. Mary Taylor, Secretary of State Jon Husted and U.S. Rep. Jim Renacci have announced bids for governor. All are seeking to replace Republican Gov. John Kasich, who is term-limited and leaves office in January 2019.

Sutton announces new department to create jobs

Posted Aug 30, 2017 at 5:48 PM, Updated Aug 30, 2017 at 5:48 PM

Democratic gubernatorial candidate Betty Sutton on Tuesday unveiled a plan to create a new state agency aimed at spurring the creation of well-paying jobs.

Sutton, a former U.S. representative from Copley, said that if elected she would create a Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity.

"I believe that when workers are at the center of our policy we will increase jobs and wages and prosperity. As governor, I will make Ohio the 'Opportunity State' — a place that creates opportunity for everyone," she said in a statement.

The department would work with other state agencies, educational institutions and the business community to "streamline efforts and cut red-tape when necessary," the statement said. The agency also would evaluate the efficiency of the Ohio's workforce and economic-development programs.

In addition, it would "approach Congress and the White House with facts, and vigorously oppose trade deals and policies that will kill jobs in Ohio and we'll fight for initiatives and programs that create them," the statement said.

"We're going to rekindle the spirit of innovation that drove Thomas Edison, the Wright Brothers, and John Glenn to change the world," Sutton said. "Remember, a few short years ago, there was no Silicon Valley, no Microsoft or Apple, there were just some guys working in their garage. At this very moment, there's someone working somewhere on the next big thing—I want it to take flight in Ohio," said Sutton.

Also vying for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination are Sen. Joe Schiavoni of Boardman, Dayton Mayor Nan Whaley and former state Rep. Connie Pillich of Montgomery.

On the Republican side, Attorney General Mike DeWine, Lt. Gov. Mary Taylor, Secretary of State Jon Husted and U.S. Rep. Jim Renacci have announced bids for

Dayton Daily News
www.daytondailynews.com

Strict rules in Ohio program deny payouts to thousands of victims

Posted: 1:06 p.m. Wednesday, August 30, 2017

An Ohio program that compensates crime victims rejects thousands of applicants each year — including victims of rape and assault and the families of those murdered — because of strict rules that disqualify people for reasons that include criminal or drug histories.

Advocates say the state goes too far toward helping only victims it deems worthy.

The Ohio Victims Compensation Fund program, funded mostly by court fees and administered by the Attorney General's office, has been paying out less each year going back a decade even as the number of claims spiked, a Dayton Daily News investigation found.

Victims compensation 2

In one case examined by the newspaper, a 17-year-old who was abducted and allegedly sexually assaulted before being rescued from a motel in Moraine was denied compensation after drugs were found in her system. It didn't matter that her family said she was fed the drugs by her abductors, who intended to force her into sex trafficking.

"The victim's program they have in place is not doing what it's intended to do," said the girl's mother, who is being identified only as Angela to hide the identity of her daughter. "It's not helping the victims. It's not helping the families."

Program rules disqualify people with drugs in their system, even if the drugs had nothing to do with the crime or were taken days prior.

The program also disqualifies people believed to have committed certain felony crimes in the previous 10 years, regardless of whether they were charged or acquitted.

State Rep. Bill Seitz, a Republican and Cincinnati defense attorney, said the state shouldn't be rejecting applications "because of some unproven allegation of prior criminal activity. I think that's over-broad," he said. "I think that's clearly over-broad."

"We've gone out of our way to recognize that oftentimes people who are sexually trafficked have been forced into a life of criminal acts and we don't want to hold that against them," Seitz said of the program's limitations.

The program has been around for decades and is funded through drivers license reinstatement fees and court costs paid by people accused of crimes. Last year, the fund collected \$16.6 million in revenue and ended the year with a balance of \$17.3 million after paying out \$6.8 million in victim compensation payments and spending \$5.9 million on administrative costs, mostly for staff salaries. The office also used the fund to cover the cost of \$3 million in rape kits.

Elizabeth Well, legal director of the Ohio Crime Victim Justice Center, said the program's restrictions can undermine one of its goals, which is to encourage victims to report crimes.

"Obviously we know we are in an opioid epidemic in Ohio, which has been progressively getting worse and worse and there are going to be more victims because (addicts) are the most vulnerable," she said.

'If they're eligible, it's paid'

Matthew Kanai, chief of the AG's crime victims service division, said his office has little discretion in awarding assistance and is guided by the eligibility rules laid out in the law.

"If they're eligible, it's paid," he said. "If they're not eligible, it isn't."

The \$6.8 million in aid distributed in 2016 was down from \$7.4 million in 2015, and has steadily dropped since 2007, when \$14.4 million in payments were made.

Last year, new and supplemental claims rose 20 percent — from 4,616 to 5,551 — while the number of claims receiving payouts decreased from 2,948 to 2,893.

Kanai said his office doesn't know why there's been a decline in payouts. "We are actively working on ways to meet more people, make the process simpler, and get more victims compensation," he said.

Columbus attorney Michael Falleur lauded the Ohio program, which he said is one of the nation's best. Applicants whose claims are denied by the Attorney General can appeal to the Ohio Court of Claims, he said, which historically has taken a looser interpretation of the statutes.

But Falleur said too many victims are denied compensation because of trace amounts of drugs or mere suspicion of prior criminal activity. Ohio's prohibition against paying family members of people accused of — but not convicted of — felonies stems back to Cleveland gangster John Nardi, Falleur said. When Nardi was killed in a car bomb in 1977, he had been charged with multiple felonies but not convicted, meaning his family would be eligible for compensation.

Since then the Ohio General Assembly has made several changes to widen eligibility. The most recent change, which took effect this year, eliminated a two-year statute of limitations for filing claims.

Victim advocates applaud the change because they say it gives victims — including women in abusive relationships — more time to report the crime and seek compensation.

Audrey Starr, spokeswoman for the YWCA Dayton, which treats battered women, said most of the women they serve don't qualify for compensation because they're not ready or willing to turn in their spouse or partner.

Only 25 percent of all physical assaults and 20 percent of all rapes perpetrated against females by their partners are reported to the police, she said.

Dayton attorney Beth Kolotkin, who specializes in victims compensation claims, said the program is not promoted as well as it once was, and argues that applicants are often not told the state will pay for an attorney at no charge to help them apply.

"The chilling factor I think is a lack of awareness," she said.

'It was amazing that I lived'

Paula Humphrey, a 70-year-old Dayton woman who was assaulted last year by a juvenile who broke into her home, was initially denied compensation because she lacked the proper paperwork.

Although she filed an appeal and won, Humphrey said of the process: "I didn't expect it to be so difficult."

"It wasn't the dollar amount, it was just the compassion that yes I was injured, not just physically, but emotionally, economically, physically, spiritually — it was a real blow to me," she said. "I thought the victims compensation program was a way to affirm to people (that) this was an injustice."

In her appeal, Humphrey described the brutal attack, which left her with a concussion and broken ribs.

"The juvenile who attacked me choked me, and put his shirt over my head, and tried to choke me to unconscious," she wrote. "I fought with all my might, which provoked him even more, and he hit me in my face and head at least eight times. Five times during the attack, he verbalized intentions to kill me. At my age, it was amazing that I lived through this attack, and I feel that had I not been the strong person I am, I would not have survived."

Her assailant, who was 16 at the time, was convicted of aggravated burglary and felonious assault and was sentenced to seven years in prison.

Humphrey hired Kolotkin and she ultimately received \$408, which reimbursed her for her mileage to and from the hospital and covered her medical deductibles. She was not compensated for the glasses she had to buy to replace the ones broken during the attack.

Victims are reimbursed for out-of-pocket costs, including hospital charges and — for families of murdered victims — funeral and burial expenses. The program does not pay for pain and suffering or lost property.

Last year, the average reimbursement was \$2,369. Payouts totaled \$337,698 in Montgomery County, \$82,101 in Butler County, \$63,935 in Miami County, \$53,149 in Greene County and \$38,804 in Clark County.

Kanai said AG's office is not looking for reasons to deny claims.

"We try to encourage everybody who has been a victim to apply and allow us to work out the eligibility later," he said.

'I think she was about to be trafficked'

To see what criteria is used to reject applications, the newspaper used Ohio public records laws to obtain "Reconsideration Reports" filed with the Attorney General's office when someone appeals a denial of their claim.

The April 2016 case involving Angela's 17-year-old daughter stood out.

Angela said her daughter has developmental issues that leave her with the maturity and decision-making skills of a 10-year-old. Although her daughter told Angela she was meeting a friend at a gas station, she never met the friend. Instead, a man she didn't know and his father stopped and told her to get into their car, Angela said.

"Somebody says to do it and she does it because she says she's too afraid not to do it," Angela said of her daughter's mental state.

The men took the girl back to their house, where they gave her alcohol, methamphetamine and cocaine and the younger man allegedly sexually assaulted her, according to Angela. Then they took her to a motel in Moraine where she was forced to have sex with a third man, the mother said.

"I think she was about to be trafficked," Angela said. "I think she was about to disappear permanently."

But the girl got in touch with her sister, who found the motel. Angela said the men fled when the sister arrived, and then the girls called police. She was transported to the hospital for a rape kit and that's when the drugs were found in her system.

"The drugs in her system were because of the crime," Angela said. "They were forcing that on her."

Police identified the younger man and issued a warrant for his arrest that was served in Shelby County. He was accused of felony rape by use of intoxicants and corrupting another with drugs, but a grand jury declined to indict him, according to court records.

The girl has since undergone counseling, but is not eligible for compensation from the state because she admitted to using the drugs, according to the letter denying Angela's request for reconsideration.

"The law states that if a victim was using or in possession of a felony drug on or in their person at the time of the crime giving rise to a claim for compensation, such felonious conduct shall result in the denial of a claim," the letter says.

Kanai said there is an exception to the rule if victims can show they were forced to take drugs or took them involuntarily.

Angela wrote in her reconsideration appeal that her daughter "was given alcohol, cocaine and meth by her abductor to subdue her and keep her compliant. That's why she had them in her system."

But the AG's office responded saying she "voluntarily used cocaine, the use or possession of which is felonious."

Angela said she gave up at that point, despite lost income from missing work and other hardships. She didn't know she could get a free attorney.

Well, whose agency works on behalf of crime victims throughout the state, expressed shock at the outcome of Angela's case.

Drugs are often used by the perpetrators of human trafficking to control the women, she said, and holding that against the victim is removing an incentive for them to report the crime.

"My opinion is because (human trafficking) is happening in our state and across the country I would think at some point they would have to take a look at that and change the law," she said.

Falleur says he routinely sees victims of assault who are denied compensation because they have drugs in their system, and it doesn't matter if the drugs are a factor in the crime.

"That dirty tox screen is going to disqualify them even if it had nothing to do with their victimization," he said. "They ended that 30-minute high, yet they're found to be in possession of drugs a week later."

In a 2011 case Falleur pushed through the Ohio Court of Claims, a Columbus woman was killed by her ex-boyfriend who then committed suicide. Her autopsy found trace amounts of cocaine, meaning she had used the drug possibly days before she was murdered, according to Falleur.

A judge denied the claim saying the law was clear that even trace amounts of cocaine was evidence of felony conduct, meaning her children couldn't get help with her burial, Falleur said.

"I don't think that's in the directive of the program," he said.

'This awful category'

Kanai said judicial precedent typically guides the state in determining whether to disqualify someone.

"The courts have found being involved in a drug deal is an inherently dangerous activity," he said.

The mother of Antoine Jones of Kettering says the state's compensation rules don't take into account that the person who dies isn't the only victim of a crime.

Jones, 16, was shot dead in a shootout that stemmed from an apparent robbery last year. The bodies of Jones and Fausto Sosa, 20, of Trotwood were found in Jones' car, along with a gun and more than a pound of marijuana in the trunk.

Victims compensation was denied to Jones' family because he appeared to be involved in selling drugs when he died, according to the records.

Carolyn Williams, his mother, said people in her situation must deal with their grief, often miss work and have to pay thousands of dollars to bury their loved ones.

"There's nothing available for people who fall into this awful category," she said.

No innocent victims: Carolyn Williams

"I wasn't aware of my son's activities until he died," Williams said. "It's just another slap in the face from the state of Ohio and their lack of compassion for victims of crime regardless of how a crime happened. We are the victims. My son was a victim who died for a senseless reason. He wasn't doing the best thing at the time that it happened, but it definitely wasn't worth someone taking his life."

'They need help'

The denial letters obtained by the newspaper often expressed regret that the state could not pay the claim.

"I don't think any person with a heart would say people in these situations are not victims," said Dan Tierney, spokesman for the Ohio Attorney General's Office. "We have a program here that was established by the legislature, and (the law determines) whether these people are eligible for compensation."

Despite some of the problems, Kolotkin credits Ohio officials for creating the program, expanding it in recent years, and offering free legal assistance for applicants.

Financial hardship makes recovery that much more difficult for victims, she and others said.

"It (the program) really does help provide for innocent victims of violent crime," she said. "The things that happen shouldn't define them. The need to be able to move forward and they need help moving forward."

Victims compensation awards by county 2016

County Awards Total

Butler: \$82,101

Champaign: \$2,934

Clark: \$38,804

Greene: \$53,149

Miami: \$63,935

Montgomery: \$337,698

Preble: \$3,841

Warren: \$24,720

Source: Ohio Attorney General

Costs covered by the victims compensation program

Medical bills

Funeral and burial expenses

Counseling

Crime scene cleanup

Dependants' economic losses resulting from the death of a victim.

Costs not covered

Pain and suffering

Stolen property

Insurance

In-depth coverage

To do this story the newspaper used Ohio's Public Records law to gather information on a state program that is designed to ease the transition to recovery for victims of violent crime. The months-long investigation found the amount of assistance paid through the program has been steadily declining for a decade even as claims have risen. Your subscription dollars pay for this type of reporting, which is not done by any other local media outlet.

Drug overdose deaths jump 33% in Ohio

Updated 4:26 p.m Wednesday, Aug. 30, 2017

Columbus – Accidental drug overdoses killed 4,050 Ohioans in 2016, a 33 percent increase over the 3,050 fatal overdoses in 2015, according to a report released Wednesday by the state Department of Health.

Driving the spike is the emergence of fentanyl, carfentanil and cocaine laced with fentanyl, the health department reported. Fentanyl and carfentanil — synthetic opiate painkillers which can be hundreds of times stronger than heroin — played a role in 58 percent of the deaths last year. Among cocaine overdose deaths, 80 percent involved an opiate as well.

Fatal cocaine overdoses are up 61.9 percent and deaths linked to fentanyl and related drugs jumped 104 percent in 2016 over 2015.

The stunning increase comes after the state poured roughly \$1 billion into efforts to combat the crisis, including expanding Ohio Medicaid to offer drug addiction treatment to tens of thousands of Ohioans.

"Ohio's addiction epidemic has surged to unthinkable proportions. Current efforts are falling woefully short. It's time to turn the state's full attention to the prevention and treatment of substance use disorders," said Lori Criss, Chief Executive of the Ohio Council of Behavioral Health & Family Service Providers.

The 10-page report is available [here](#).

There are some glimmers of positive news: heroin overdose deaths rose just 1.4 percent to 1,444 in 2016; prescription opiate overdose deaths continued a five-year decline, hitting 564 in 2016; queries to Ohio's prescription drug monitoring database reached 24.1 million last year; and the total doses of prescription opiates continued its four-year decline.

"This progress is significant because prescription opioid abuse is frequently a gateway to heroin and fentanyl use later on," said Dr. Mark Hurst, medical director for the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services.

Still, as prescription painkillers are more difficult to obtain, addicts often turn to street drugs such as heroin.

Steps Ohio has taken to combat the crisis include: expanding Ohio Medicaid to provide drug addiction treatment services, distributing naloxone to police, firefighters and others to help reverse overdoses, stepping up enforcement efforts to catch drug traffickers, beefing up the state's online prescription tracking database, shutting down "pill mills" that prescribed opiates with little medical justification, and instituting prescribing guidelines and rules for pain management clinics, short-term pain treatment and others.

Ohio Secretary of State Jon Husted, a Republican who is running for governor, issued a statement that said in part: "This is a crisis and needs to be treated as a health emergency. The primary culprit behind so many of these deaths is fentanyl flowing into our country from Mexico and China. Federal assistance is needed to stop this poison from coming into our country and killing our people."

Earlier this year, Attorney General Mike DeWine, a Republican, and Dayton Mayor Nan Whaley, a Democrat, filed separate lawsuits against drug manufacturers, alleging that they used deceptive marketing practices to sell prescription opioids.

Accidental drug overdose deaths by county in 2016:

Butler: 211

Champaign: 10

Clark: 73

Greene: 44

Miami: 39

Montgomery: 320

Warren: 58

Ohio Total: 4,050

Mentally ill inmates set to be executed in Ohio, group says

Updated 1:19 p.m Wednesday, Aug. 30, 2017

Columbus – Ohio is planning to execute nearly two dozen men who have suffered childhood trauma, serious mental illness and intellectual impairment, according to the Fair Punishment Project at Harvard University.

“We found that these men are among the most impaired and traumatized among us — a pattern replicated across America’s death rows,” the project said in a 13-page report to be released today. “At least 17 out of the 26 men experienced serious childhood trauma — horrifying instances of extensive physical and sexual abuse.”

Six of the Ohio death row inmates suffer from mental illness and at least seven have IQ scores below 85, the report said. The group argues that those with intellectual impairments are not eligible for the death penalty and those with mental illnesses should not be executed.

Ohio adopted its current death penalty statute in 1981. Since executions resumed in 1999, Ohio has put 54 men to death and has 26 more executions scheduled through 2020. There are 139 inmates on Ohio Death Row.

In 2014, a task force appointed by the Ohio Supreme Court offered 56 ways to improve the capital punishment system in Ohio but very few of those recommendations have been adopted by state lawmakers.

Inmate Gary Otte, who robbed and shot two people to death in 1992, is scheduled to be executed Sept. 13.

The Fair Punishment Project said Otte as a child showed signs of social isolation, psychological problems, developmental delays and learning disabilities. He began abusing drugs and alcohol at age 10 and first attempted suicide at age 14.

Ohio to start new limits on painkiller prescriptions Thursday

Updated 1:41 p.m Wednesday, Aug. 30, 2017

Columbus – Starting Thursday, patients coming off an injury or minor surgery will face strict limits in how many opiates they can be prescribed for their acute pain and doctors who ignore the new rules could face sanctions, state officials warned Wednesday.

“I don’t care who you are. You violate these guidelines and the Medical Board will come after you and you will be disciplined and perhaps even lose your license. Let’s be clear about this, this is really, really serious stuff,” said Ohio Gov. John Kasich at a press conference. Doctors have a responsibility to dispense opiates in a responsible manner, he said.

The new rules allow for seven days of opiates for adults and five days for children when the drugs are prescribed to treat acute pain, such as after surgeries or injuries. The rules also set limits on the total morphine equivalent dose doled out and prescribers will be required to report diagnoses when opiates are prescribed.

The goal of tightening opiates given for acute pain is prevent people from becoming the next generation of opioid addicts.

Kasich said amid all the bad news about the opiate addiction crisis, data show a decline in the number of prescribed opiate doses, the incidence of “doctor shopping,” and deaths attributed to accidental overdoses on prescribed drugs. Kasich pointed to steps the state has taken to combat the crisis and held Ohio up as a national model.

"This is a direction that the entire country ought to think about. It's a road map to how you begin to solve this problem," Kasich said.

Ohio has taken several steps to combat the opioid addiction crisis, including expanding Ohio Medicaid under Obamacare, which then freed up money for drug addiction treatment services; requiring pharmacy technicians to register with the Ohio Board of Pharmacy; limit opiate prescriptions to a 90-day supply; and issue prescribing guidelines for chronic pain management clinics, emergency rooms, and acute care facilities.

Across the nation, drug overdoses kill roughly 142 people a day, including about 11 each day in Ohio.

More than 10 years ago, the state established the Ohio Automated Rx Reporting System — a database that doctors, dentists and pharmacists must check and report to when opiate prescriptions are involved. The database can detect "doctor shopping" by addicts seeking painkillers.

Ohio Attorney General Mike DeWine and Dayton Mayor Nan Whaley, both candidates for governor in 2018, filed high-profile lawsuits against pharmaceutical companies for the marketing tactics used to sell powerful painkillers.

Kasich sounded a warning about fentanyl being laced into heroin, cocaine, marijuana or other street drugs.

"For those people who are out there who think it's safe to meet somebody on the corner and score a little something, you're playing with your life," he said.

THE PLAIN DEALER

ECOT sponsor will pay back money over time, just like the school

Posted on August 30, 2017 at 1:41 PM

CLEVELAND, Ohio - The sponsor of the controversial ECOT online school will repay money the state says it owes - just over time, like the school will.

The Electronic Classroom of Tomorrow (ECOT), Ohio's largest charter school, is facing a \$60 million bill to return much of its state funding for the 2015-16 school year. The Ohio Department of Education says the school was overpaid because it inflated its attendance, an accusation the school denies and is challenging before the Ohio Supreme Court.

Those overpayments trickled down to several other organizations that the school paid as a percentage of its revenue, State Auditor Dave Yost said earlier this month.

Those include companies owned by ECOT founder William Lager that provide technical and curriculum support for the school and the school's sponsor - the Educational Service Center of Lake Erie West.

"Sponsors," who allow schools to collect state taxes to operate and who oversee the schools, collect fees from the school for their services. The ESC, a Toledo-area government body, typically collects about \$1.5 million a year from ECOT for that work.

Yost said earlier this month that since those payments were based on ECOT's overstated enrollment, the ESC should pay money back to ECOT that the school would use to help pay back the state. Yost estimated that the ESC owes about \$900,000 for that school year.

Apryl Morin, who heads the sponsorship work for the ESC, defended collection of those fees.

"The ESC has collected all sponsorship fees consistent with state law and its sponsorship contract," Morin told The Plain Dealer. "They were provided as valuable consideration in exchange for school sponsorship services that the ESC actually provided."

But Morin said the money will be returned over time - through lower-than usual fees from ECOT.

The school isn't writing a check to the state to repay the cash. Since it is still operating and still receiving state money to educate students, the state is just reducing its ongoing payments to the school. That \$60 million will be deducted from payments to the school over two years.

Since sponsorship fees are paid to the ESC as a percentage of revenue, the state deductions for ECOT translate into lower revenue and, in turn, reduced fees to the ESC.

"The ESC will continue to collect its sponsorship fee based on a percentage of ECOT's received funding, which, going forward, will reflect any deductions by ODE for repayment," Morin said.

Yost spokesman Ben Marrison said that approach may work.

"What is described here may indeed meet the requirement established by the Auditor," he said. " But we cannot be certain until our auditors have reviewed the documentation in the school's upcoming audits and subsequent audits."

An Ohio Department of Education attendance review last year found ECOT, a charter school whose students take classes online and from home, was paid for 9,000 more students in 2015-16 than the school could document.

That review found that the school had proper documentation for only 6,300 of its 15,300 students - a 59% gap.

The state school board voted earlier this year to recover the money the school was paid to educate those students - \$60 million out of the more than \$100 million the school receives each year. A review of the 2016-17 year is ongoing.

New rules limit opioid prescriptions in Ohio

Updated on August 30, 2017 at 2:53 PM, Posted on August 30, 2017 at 1:51 PM

COLUMBUS, Ohio - Ohio doctors can prescribe only seven days of opioids for adults in acute pain, under new rules that begin Thursday. Children are limited to five days.

The rules, announced in March and reiterated Wednesday by state medical leaders and Gov. John Kasich, are an attempt to curb dependence on the drugs. The rules could reduce the amount of opioids prescribed by 109 million doses in Ohio, ground zero for opioid overdose deaths.

The regulations will require doctors, dentists, physician assistants and others who prescribe the drugs to include the diagnosis or procedure code on all opioid prescriptions beginning Dec. 29. That information will be used to track whether people are being overprescribed. Medical professionals will face sanctions if there are problems.

"If you're a dentist, doctor, I don't care who you are, you violate these guidelines, the medical board will come after you," Kasich said. "And you will be disciplined and perhaps even lose your license."

Since January 2016, Ohio has had voluntary guidelines on prescribing opioids, Kasich said. The voluntary program built support for rules to limit opioid prescriptions.

The rules will not apply to opioid prescriptions written for chronic pain or for cancer, palliative and hospice care or for medicines that assist with addiction treatment.

State Rep. Kirk Schuring, a Canton Republican who is a member of Ohio House leadership, said the new regulations "will stem the supply chain of opioids prescription drugs that, unfortunately, oftentimes lead to addiction and oftentimes death," he said.

People addicted to heroin and other street opioids frequently report they first got hooked by being prescribed morphine, codeine, oxycodone or hydrocodone.

Peggy Miller of Marion said she became addicted to opioids in 2007, when she injured her shoulder at work and received a prescription for pain. The need to fuel her addiction, she said, caused her to once purposely throw herself down a flight of stairs to get a prescription for the injury. She also underwent unnecessary surgery to get opioids for recovery.

She's been clean and sober since March 2013 and now works to help other addicts turn around their lives, she said.

"People are dying over this," she said. "And I am so humbled and happy that you guys have made this such an important issue today, because years ago it was not."

Jerry Springer tests the waters in Cleveland for governor bid

Updated on August 30, 2017 at 2:44 PM, Posted on August 30, 2017 at 1:49 PM

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- Former Cincinnati Mayor and famed television talk show host Jerry Springer is still testing the waters of a potential bid for Ohio governor.

Springer appeared at a fundraiser last week for state lawmakers from Northeast Ohio where he asked about his prospects in the gubernatorial race, state Sen. Sandra Williams said.

"He's very serious," Williams said in an interview with cleveland.com.

Williams said she discussed the possibility with Springer at state Rep. Janine Boyd's house. State Rep. Stephanie Howse was also there. The Cincinnati Enquirer first reported the meeting.

Williams said Springer was also talking with other people about his possibly entering the race within the next 30 to 45 days, but a decision wasn't concrete.

The Democratic side of the governor's race has been somewhat quiet so far as big name endorsements and donors wait to see what shape the field takes. Right now, former U.S. Rep. Betty Sutton, former state Sen. Connie Pillich, Dayton Mayor Nan Whaley and former state Senate Minority Leader Joe Schiavoni are all vying for the Democratic bid.

Springer is set to appear at the SEIU 1199's Labor Day Rally on Monday as well as U.S. Rep. Marcia Fudge's Labor Day picnic.

Springer, along with Consumer Financial Protection Bureau Director Richard Cordray and former U.S. Rep. Dennis Kucinich have also been mentioned as possible candidates.

Cordray is making a Labor Day appearance in Cincinnati, with speculation mounting that he may announce his entrance into the race.

To appear in any of the Democratic Party's debates, the potential candidates would have to go through the party's vetting process. The party is planning six debates with the first taking place Sept. 12 in Martins Ferry.

Over 4,000 Ohioans died of drug overdoses in 2016, a 33 percent increase

Updated on August 30, 2017 at 5:17 PM, Posted on August 30, 2017 at 2:44 PM

COLUMBUS, Ohio - Last year, 4,050 Ohio residents died of unintentional drug overdoses, up 32.8 percent from 2015, according a state report released Wednesday.

Nearly a third of those deaths were in Northeast Ohio.

State officials are attributing the surge to stronger drugs, including fentanyl and the emergence of a similar drug, carfentanil. Carfentanil was involved in 340 overdose deaths, most of them in the second half of the year, according to the Ohio Department of Health's annual drug overdose death report.

Generally, heroin is twice as potent as morphine. Fentanyl is 50 times as potent as heroin and carfentanil is 50 times more potent as fentanyl. Sometimes people take a drug - usually heroin and sometimes cocaine - not knowing what substances are mixed in. They end up overdosing on fentanyl or carfentanil, said John Born, director of the Ohio Department of Public Safety.

"It takes very little to produce an overdose that can result in death," said Tracy Plouck, director of the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services.

Ohio has spent millions of dollars in drug prevention education, increasing access to treatment programs, arrests of traffickers and providing communities kits with medication that reverses drug overdoses.

Yet overdose deaths continue to rise.

Lori Criss, CEO of the Ohio Council of Behavioral Health and Family Services Providers, said in a statement Wednesday afternoon that the addiction epidemic has grown to unthinkable proportions.

"Current efforts are falling woefully short," she said. "It's time to turn the state's full attention to the prevention and treatment of substance use disorders."

Ohio's opioid epidemic began in the mid 1990s, said Dr. Mark Hurst, medical director of the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services.

"Unfortunately, the awareness of that only came retrospectively," he said.

Officials continue to work to try to stay ahead of the state's addiction problem, Hurst said, adding that a silver lining in Wednesday's report was that 2016 had the fewest unintentional prescription opioid overdose deaths since 2009.

Earlier Wednesday, Gov. John Kasich, Hurst and other officials announced new rules to limit opioid prescriptions to patients experiencing acute, or temporary, pain.

There are indications that cocaine is increasingly being used with fentanyl and other opiates. Last year, 1,109 people died of cocaine overdoses - up from 61.9 percent from 2015. Among the cocaine deaths in 2016, 80.2 percent also involved an opiate.

Fentanyl and related drug deaths in Ohio:

- 2016: 2,357
- 2015: 1,155
- 2014: 503
- 2013: 84
- 2012: 75

Overall drug overdose deaths:

- 2016: 4,050
- 2015: 3,050
- 2014: 2,531
- 2013: 2,110

- 2012: 1,914

About 28 percent of the deaths occurred in Northeast Ohio:

- Cuyahoga County: 547
- Summit: 298
- Lorain: 146
- Lake: 94
- Medina: 41
- Geauga: 24

Richard Cordray to ranking critic: Buzz off (but in nicer language)

Updated on August 30, 2017 at 4:31 PM, Posted on August 30, 2017 at 4:29 PM

WASHINGTON -- To the pressing question of whether Richard Cordray will serve out his full term or resign to run for Ohio governor, he provided an answer today:

"At this time I have no further insights to provide on the subject."

Meaning, exactly...?

Interpreting the plans or lawyerly language of Ohio's former attorney general is an insider's game, but his answer to one of his chief critics in Congress nevertheless had a delicious smack, although it sorely disappointed the critic, who was not amused.

"If he intends to serve his full term, there is no reason not to say so," said Rep. Jeb Hensarling, a Texas Republican who chairs the House Financial Services Committee and tries to needle the Ohioan when he can.

Cordray is director of the federal Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, which is loathed by congressional conservatives who say it runs roughshod over bankers and other lenders while pursuing its populist mission of protecting the little guy from predatory lenders.

He was appointed by President Barack Obama to a five year term and confirmed only reluctantly, and after a long wait, by the Senate. Congress has few powers over him and his agency, and that level of independence -- or lack of oversight and control -- riles some lawmakers.

But they can demand answers, as Hensarling did this week. Hensarling asked in a letter whether Cordray planned to serve out his five-year-term, which expires next summer. And Hensarling wanted assurances that Cordray will not let other plans or motivations -- specifically, a reported desire to run for Ohio governor -- taint his duties while still on the job in Washington. The bureau is currently working on a proposed rule to reign in practices of payday lenders.

Cordray today answered:

- "I categorically deny that political considerations have informed any aspect of my decisions, orders and communications" related to the proposed payday lending rule.
- "All records" in this will be preserved, as you asked.
- To the final question, which you keep asking and asking again, the answer about whether I'll stay or go is: "I have no further insights to provide on the subject."

Read that as you wish. Hensarling read it with disappointment and a bit of dismay.

"I am disappointed by Director Cordray's steadfast refusal to be transparent with the public about his intentions," Hensarling said in a statement.

"The only reasonable conclusion is that he therefore harbors partisan political ambitions, which calls into question the propriety of all of his recent and future actions as CFPB Director. Only Richard Cordray can clear the legal cloud now hanging over the CFPB, and it is a shame that he will not do so."

Cordray is scheduled to speak before the Ohio AFL-CIO at a Labor Day picnic Monday in Cincinnati. That has raised expectations that he may announce he is resigning his federal position and returning to Ohio to run for governor. But he also could disappoint, or wait, or stick around. To borrow a phrase, we have no further insights (publicly) on the subject right now.

Retiring Ohio judge says her appeals court seat is not needed, should be eliminated

Updated on August 30, 2017 at 5:05 PM, Posted on August 30, 2017 at 4:52 PM

COLUMBUS, Ohio -- A state appeals court judge is looking to go out with a bang - urging that when she retires in 2019, the state eliminate her judicial seat.

Diane Grendell, one of five judges on Ohio's 11th District Court of Appeals in Warren, asserted in a letter to Ohio Supreme Court Administrative Director Michael L. Buenger that her seat isn't needed, as the 11th District had the lowest caseload in the state last year. She noted that three other appellate districts in the state handle more cases with only four judges.

Eliminating her seat, Grendell wrote, "would demonstrate a judicial commitment to good stewardship of Ohio taxpayers' hard-earned tax dollars."

Grendell's judicial salary is currently \$138,600 per year, according to state records. The Republican ex-lawmaker, born in 1945, can't seek a fourth term on the appeals court because Ohio's mandatory judicial retirement age is 70.

Grendell didn't return a phone call seeking comment Wednesday.

It's rare for Ohio to abolish a judicial seat. Under Ohio Supreme Court procedures, the court will now review Grendell's proposal, solicit opinions, and make a recommendation to the Ohio General Assembly, which has final say over whether to get rid of her seat.

State Rep. Bill Seitz, a Cincinnati Republican, said he's been working with Grendell and Supreme Court officials for a few months to get the process "kick-started." Seitz said he's not currently drawing up legislation to abolish the seat. But if the Supreme Court recommends doing so, he said, the legislature would have to act quickly, before candidates file to run for the seat in the 2018 primary election.

Already, one candidate has announced plans to run for Grendell's seat: Democrat Mary Jane Trapp of Russell Township, a former Ohio State Bar Association president who served on the 11th District Appeals Court until she was defeated in the 2012 election.

Two of Grendell's colleagues on the 11th District bench, Republican Colleen Mary O'Toole and Democrat Cynthia Rice, have indicated they're not necessarily opposed to eliminating the seat. But both judges stated that no decision should be made until the release of a study currently underway examining the workloads of Ohio judges.

In an interview, Rice said she worried that the 11th District caseload will swing back up, adding that so far this year, the 11th District has had a higher caseload than a few other appeals court districts.

She also said that judges spend a lot of time on duties that don't involve hearing cases - noting that she serves on a number of judicial committees.

"No one objects to the elimination of a seat," Rice said. "The point is it needs to be done in an intelligent process. It's not just a knee-jerk [reaction] that, 'Hey, somebody's retiring, let's eliminate that seat.'"

Grendell's letter, dated Aug. 11, is the latest effort by her and her husband, Geauga County Probate/Juvenile Court Judge Tim Grendell, to shake up the state's judicial system.

Earlier this year, Tim Grendell unsuccessfully pushed lawmakers to grant probate court judges more power over park districts, including the ability to fine or penalize outside groups that "interfere" with a park district's purpose or mission.

Here is Diane Grendell's letter to Buenger:

Pro-Husted Super PAC launching statewide TV ad buy during Ohio State University football game

Updated on August 30, 2017 at 8:53 PM, Posted on August 30, 2017 at 5:19 PM

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- A Super PAC supporting Republican Ohio Secretary of State Jon Husted is launching the first major TV ad buy of the 2018 governor's race.

Ohio Conservatives for Change has reserved roughly \$365,000 in cable TV ads that will run starting Thursday through Sept. 15, according to two Republican sources who track campaign ads in Ohio. A major portion of the reservation -- about \$165,000 -- is for ads airing during tomorrow's televised Ohio State University football game. The prime-time season opener, against in-conference rival Indiana University, is sure to draw a huge audience across the state. The Super PAC has teased the commercial in a Facebook post.

The 60-second ad, which the group sent to cleveland.com on Wednesday night, features a collage of images of Husted, including family photos. It says Husted has the "vision, ideas, and background to build a brighter future for our state."

The ad series -- which will run on channels such as ESPN, Fox News, CNN, HGTV and History -- is effectively the first of the campaign season. Another Republican governor candidate, U.S. Rep. Jim Renacci, spent \$34,000 in January for a statewide run during President Donald Trump's inauguration, but at the time, he had not officially declared yet, and he billed his congressional campaign account for the expense.

The ads also are a show of strength for Husted, who is supported by Ohio Conservatives for Change, though his campaign is legally barred from coordinating with the group. The Super PAC this month reported raising \$1.3 million, including \$1 million from Clay Mathile, the former Iams Pet Food owner from the Dayton area who has helped underwrite Husted's political career.

Ohio Conservatives for Change also has hired campaign trackers -- low-level operatives who follow opposing candidates and attempt to record them making embarrassing statements. The group published a Facebook post earlier last week mocking comments Renacci had made during a campaign stop that raised doubts about the need for drug education in schools. The post goaded Renacci into responding with a Facebook video of his own, which then generated media coverage that drew attention to Renacci's little-noticed initial comments.

A spokesman for Ohio Conservatives for Change was not immediately available for comment.

Other Republican candidates for governor are Lt. Gov. Mary Taylor and Ohio Attorney General Mike DeWine. Democratic candidates include Dayton Mayor Nan Whaley, State Sen. Joe Schiavoni, former U.S. Rep. Betty Sutton and former State Rep. Connie Pillich.

Corey Lewandowski helped Josh Mandel this week, as the 'I'm-with-Trump' race continues

Updated on August 30, 2017 at 6:54 PM, Posted on August 30, 2017 at 6:53 PM

WASHINGTON -- If the prize was the Trump mantle, Josh Mandel might have won this week's political round -- although a competitor with Trump credentials disputes that.

Running for U.S. Senate, the Ohio state treasurer got Corey Lewandowski, President Donald Trump's former presidential campaign manager, to fly to Akron and appear at a Summit County fundraising reception Tuesday. Few people, including Mandel's political opponents, seemed to know about the event.

"I was in Ohio doing a fundraiser with Josh," Lewandowski, now a Washington consultant who still counsels Trump, told cleveland.com.

He said the event was at a home about five minutes from the Akron airport but said he knew few other details. Asked if he was listed as a host or sponsor, Lewandowski said he only knew he was "the draw."

Mandel hopes to challenge U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown, a Democrat, in 2018. It would be a rematch of their 2012 race, a bruising and expensive contest in which each accused the other of being an

extremist -- Brown an extreme, longtime liberal in the mold of Bernie Sanders, and Mandel a brash arch-conservative with a taste for extreme rhetoric.

Candidates frequently get well-known figures to attract donors and guests to fundraising events. But the Trump connection is especially noteworthy because both Mandel and a challenger for the Republican nomination, businessman Mike Gibbons, are vying for the Trump brand.

"Last fall, Josh Mandel supported Donald Trump when many others wouldn't," said Erica Nurnberg, a Mandel campaign spokeswoman. "Today Josh continues to advance the president's agenda while many others won't. Corey and Trump supporters across Ohio obviously recognize this fact and we're grateful and proud to have Corey's support."

The Mandel campaign would not say how much Lewandowski helped raise but said it will provide details of donations and expenses when it files its next quarterly report with the federal Election Commission.

The Gibbons campaign disputes the Trump prize went to Mandel this week.

"Disagree strongly," said Mike Biundo, a general consultant on the Gibbons campaign. Biundo, a political veteran, was a senior advisor on the Trump campaign and turned down a Trump offer for a White House role.

He noted that Gibbons last week started running digital and cable TV ads that criticize "liberals and knuckleheads at CNN," a news network Trump criticizes with relish. The Gibbons ads use Trump's trademark term, "Fake News," and Gibbons pledges in the ads to "work hard with Donald Trump to pass a conservative agenda."

"Josh had a secretive fundraiser that very few people knew about besides you," Biundo said. "Mike served as Ohio Co-Chair for RNC-Trump Victory, Josh didn't. Josh will try to spin it his way because that's what career politicians do, but the fact is Mike Gibbons is the only person in the race who is an outsider and successful businessman. Josh is in his 30s and running his 7th political campaign."

The Brown campaign had not known about the Mandel event with Lewandowski. When told, it sought to link Mandel to criticisms of cronyism and influence-brokering that have been launched about Lewandowski and others close to Trump.

"Josh Mandel has made a political career out of sucking-up to corporate special interests," said Brown campaign spokesman Preston Maddock. "He is willing to do anything -- whether that's selling out to lobbyists for campaign cash or abusing Ohioans' tax dollars for self-promotional TV ads -- to win an election."

Jerry Springer seeking advice about possible run for Ohio governor: Ohio Politics Roundup

Posted on August 31, 2017 at 6:20 AM

Jerry Springer is seeking advice about a possible run for Ohio governor. And Ohioans are weighing in on President Donald Trump's Department of Labor overtime policies.

Read more in today's Ohio Politics Roundup.

Jerry, Jerry, Jerry: Is it too late for former Cincinnati mayor and television personality Jerry Springer to enter the Ohio governor's race?

It's a question he asked Cleveland Democrats last week, Cincinnati Enquirer reporter Jessie Balmert writes.

"Springer appeared at a fundraiser last week for state lawmakers from Northeast Ohio where he asked about his prospects in the gubernatorial race, state Sen. Sandra Williams said," cleveland.com's Seth Richardson reports.

"He's very serious," Williams said in an interview with cleveland.com.

"Williams said she discussed the possibility with Springer at state Rep. Janine Boyd's house. State Rep. Stephanie Howse was also there," Richardson writes. "Williams said Springer was also talking with other people about his possibly entering the race within the next 30 to 45 days, but a decision wasn't concrete."

"The Democratic side of the governor's race has been somewhat quiet so far as big name endorsements and donors wait to see what shape the field takes. Right now, former U.S. Rep. Betty Sutton, former state Sen. Connie Pillich, Dayton Mayor Nan Whaley and former state Senate Minority Leader Joe Schiavoni are all vying for the Democratic bid," Richardson writes. "Springer is set to appear at the SEIU 1199's Labor Day Rally on Monday as well as U.S. Rep. Marcia Fudge's Labor Day picnic."

Overtime in Ohio: Donald Trump's Department of Labor is asking the public for feedback about overtime, cleveland.com's Stephen Koff writes.

"When people get paid for every hour they work, it could mean the difference between affording and struggling to cover child care, feed their families, and cover their bills," said Nichole Wilson of Orwell.

"Workers' rights and wages should not be undercut even further by weakening the salary threshold," said Matt Maras of Cincinnati.

"So far, most of the Ohioans commenting -- just a sliver of the 135,000 people from across the country weighing in so far -- want what (President Barack) Obama wanted," Koff writes. "They want the federal government to require that if any worker making under \$913 a week (the equivalent of \$47,476 a year) puts in more than 40 hours a week, he or she will get time-and-a-half pay for every extra hour. That is slightly more than double the current standard, at \$455 a week. A higher mark could boost the take-home pay for nearly 5 million American workers, supporters say. "

Trump's labor department could green light some version of these requests, but is unlikely to go that far, Koff writes.

"Business groups will push back again if he tries, with some saying last time that they couldn't afford higher wages and would have to cut workers' hours instead," Koff writes. "The question is, what will Trump do, and how many people will it affect? "

Ward 14: "The race for Cleveland's Ward 14 City Council seat is shaping up to be among the city's most contentious," cleveland.com's Andrew J. Tobias writes. "Through the course of the race, candidates or their supporters have filed a criminal complaint, challenged the voter eligibility of a candidate's family members, publicized past legal issues, successfully pressured one candidate to step down from her job and alleged that another candidate -- with the help of his uncle, a sitting councilman from another ward -- is a 'ghost candidate' meant to split off votes. The race is tinged with old score settling of past political grudges."

Here's a look at some of the candidates: "Incumbent Councilman Brian Cummins, who has represented the diverse West Side ward since 2006, is trying to hang on to his seat. He won his 2013 re-election bid by only 19 votes," Tobias writes. "It was Cummins who cast the swing vote to try to fast-track a taxpayer-funded overhaul of Quicken Loans Arena, favored by Jackson, Kelley and other civic leaders, but canceled this week following activist opposition."

"Cummins is facing a spirited challenge from Jasmin Santana, a longtime ward resident who has been endorsed by the ward's Democratic club and its influential leader, Rick Nagin, who finished second to Cummins in the 2009 election," Tobias writes. "Santana was born and raised in Ward 14, and lives in the Clark-Fulton neighborhood. She said Cummins has not been responsive to the concerns of residents in the ward, which is one of the city's poorest."

Religious rights: "In announcing his 'faith outreach team' on Tuesday, Ohio Treasurer Josh Mandel took up a fight already declared by President Donald Trump," Columbus Dispatch reporter Marty Schladen writes. "Mandel, who is seeking the GOP nomination to challenge Democratic U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown, said the faith team's top goal would be to get rid of the Johnson Amendment, a 1954 law prohibiting churches and other nonprofit organizations from endorsing political candidates or raising money for them. Mandel and other opponents of the law say it unfairly limits religious groups' political speech, and at this year's National Prayer Breakfast, Trump said he would 'totally destroy' it."

Betty Sutton's new department: Former U.S. Rep. Betty Sutton proposed creating the Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity as part of her gubernatorial campaign in front of more than 100 union workers in Cleveland, cleveland.com's Richardson writes.

The department's aim is "facilitating the growth of good jobs, while enhancing the well-being and economic security of Ohioans." Sutton said it would be involved in job growth, creation, incubators and economic development throughout the state.

Sutton didn't have a number for how much it would cost to create the new department, but said it could actually cut costs by removing red tape and streamlining some processes.

"I think we have to look and see how big the department might need to be," Sutton said.

There's also that whole problem of Republicans not really digging the idea of creating a new government agency. Sutton said the possible cost-savings plus streamlining of duties could bring GOPers over to her side.

"It's more of a reorientation so we're focusing things so they work well for both workers and businesses," she said. "I think that's something that everyone can go for."

Endorsed: Cleveland Mayor Frank Jackson, who's running a fourth term, was endorsed by Democrat U.S. Rep. Marcy Kaptur, of Toledo. She represents parts of the Cleveland area.

"Congresswoman Kaptur has been a major supporter of Cleveland and plays an important role in our future," Jackson said.

TV buy: "A Super PAC supporting Republican Ohio Secretary of State Jon Husted is launching the first major TV ad buy of the 2018 governor's race," cleveland.com's Tobias writes. "Ohio Conservatives for Change has reserved roughly \$365,000 in cable TV ads that will run starting Thursday through Sept. 15, according to two Republican sources who track campaign ads in Ohio. A major portion of the reservation -- about \$165,000 -- is for ads airing during Thursday's televised Ohio State University football game. The prime-time season opener, against in-conference rival Indiana University, is sure to draw a huge audience across the state. The Super PAC has teased the commercial in a Facebook post."

"The ad series -- which will run on channels such as ESPN, Fox News, CNN, HGTV and History -- is effectively the first of the campaign season. Another Republican governor candidate, U.S. Rep. Jim Renacci, spent \$34,000 in January for a statewide run during President Donald Trump's inauguration, but at the time, he had not officially declared yet, and he billed his congressional campaign account for the expense," Tobias writes.

I'm with Trump: "If the prize was the Trump mantle, Josh Mandel might have won this week's political round -- although a competitor with Trump credentials disputes that," writes cleveland.com's Koff.

"Running for U.S. Senate, the Ohio state treasurer got Corey Lewandowski, President Donald Trump's former presidential campaign manager, to fly to Akron and appear at a Summit County fundraising reception Tuesday."

But a consultant to businessman Mike Gibbons, who is challenging Mandel, was unimpressed.

"Josh had a secretive fundraiser that very few people knew about besides you," Mike Biundo told Koff. "Mike served as Ohio Co-Chair for RNC-Trump Victory, Josh didn't. Josh will try to spin it his way because that's what career politicians do, but the fact is Mike Gibbons is the only person in the race who is an outsider and successful businessman. Josh is in his 30s and running his 7th political campaign."

Q deal panned: Challengers hoping to unseat Cleveland Mayor Frank Jackson said Wednesday night that they opposed a now-canceled plan to use taxpayer money for upgrades at Quicken Loans Arena, writes cleveland.com's Tobias.

Their comments came during a candidate forum organized by the League of Women Voters.

THE ENQUIRER

Ohio drug overdose deaths more than double, thanks to fentanyl

Published 7:59 p.m. ET Aug. 30, 2017 | Updated 8:02 p.m. ET Aug. 30, 2017

Fentanyl and related potent opioids were involved in more than half of the 4,050 drug overdose deaths in Ohio last year, according to a new report by the Ohio Department of Health.

Unintentional drug overdose deaths have more than doubled over the past five years due to the prevalence of the powerful opioids, which can be hundreds of times more potent than heroin.

Since 2011, Butler County's overdose death rate has ranked second in the state, and Clermont County's has ranked fourth, the Department of Health said Wednesday.

Earlier that day, Gov. John Kasich had touted the decline in prescription drug overdoses, which he attributed in part to limiting the number of pain pills doctors could prescribe. But heroin and now fentanyl deaths have dwarfed prescription pill-related deaths, overtaking the state's efforts to stanch the drug epidemic.

"This challenge keeps morphing," Kasich said.

In 2016, coroners across the state also noted a marked increase in the presence of cocaine – nearly a 62 percent year-to-year increase – making it the third most-prevalent drug in unintentional drug overdose deaths. More than half of those with cocaine in their system also had fentanyl, according to the state report.

In Greater Cincinnati:

- Warren County saw the largest percent increase in overdose deaths from 2015 to 2016. Last year, 58 people died of drug overdoses, up from 42 in 2015. The county's annual overdose death rate since 2011 trails the state average.
- Overdose deaths in Butler County increased from 195 in 2015 to 211 in 2016. In the last five years, the county has seen 37.9 overdose deaths annually per 100,000 residents, the second-highest in the state.

- In Clermont County, the overdose death rate was 37.5 per 100,000 residents, fourth-highest in the state. Ninety-six people died of an overdose last year, down from 105 in 2015.
- In Hamilton County, 318 residents died of an unintentional drug overdose in 2016, down from 335 in 2015. Since 2011, the rate of local deaths was 29.4 per 100,000 residents, 13th highest in the state.

The state's annual overdose death rate per 100,000 residents was 22.2 over the last five years. Montgomery County has the highest rate of overdose death with 40 per 100,000 residents.

Among those who died of an unintentional drug overdose in 2016, the Ohio Board of Pharmacy reported over 80 percent had a history in Ohio of being prescribed prescription pain medication at some point.

The state has targeted prescribing guidelines and monitoring of opioids such as OxyContin and Vicodin in an effort to curb the number of deaths.

"We're trying to regulate prescription drug prescribing so fewer people get addicted and fewer people transition" to stronger opiates, said Steve Schierholt, director of the Ohio Pharmacy Board.

Among those efforts is encouraging doctors to review the state's prescription monitoring system; in June there were 327,000 queries per day to the system up from just 77,000 queries per day in June 2016, Schierholt said.

The spike in fentanyl and carfentanil across the state often obscures the impact those efforts are having. While prescription pain medication was present in 667 unintentional drug overdose deaths in 2016, that was the lowest number since 2009 and the fifth straight year there has been a decline, according to the report.

In addition, 50,000 Ohioans are in recovery with the aid of medication assisted treatment like Vivitrol and Suboxone.

"We have a lot of people in recovery in this state," said Dr. Mark Hurst, Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services' medical director. "We don't want to promote, 'If you use these drugs, everyone dies,' because a lot of people recover."

Enquirer state capital reporters Jessie Balmert and Chrissie Thompson contributed to this report.

Should Cincinnati invest in private prisons?

Published 2:44 p.m. ET Aug. 30, 2017 | Updated 8:08 a.m. ET Aug. 31, 2017

Cincinnati's pension system has at least \$2.5 million invested in a company connected with private prisons, and some city leaders said that money should not support an "immoral" system.

Councilman P.G. Sittenfeld, with support from at least four other council members - a majority - proposed a policy Wednesday asking the city's pension board to divest from any companies doing business in private prisons.

The city joins a national debate over private prisons. Backers of such prisons say they can save money and help an overcrowded system; critics say private prisons place profit ahead of rehabilitation.

"If you want a glimpse into a person or a city's values, then follow the money," Sittenfeld said. "And the money that flows into the private prison business is a stain on our community."

Mayor John Cranley and the challenger for his seat, Yvette Simpson, said at the press conference they support the motion. They were joined by former Ohio Governor Ted Strickland, Ohio civil service union President Chris Mabe and representatives from the Ohio ACLU, Ohio Justice and Policy Center and the Cincinnati NAACP.

Mabe, with nearly 30 years of corrections experience, called the privatization of prisons in the country an "unholy cause."

"We have a moral compass in the Department of Corrections about right and wrong, we have a job of rehabilitation, not reincarceration for profits," he said. "We respond to the taxpayers, the families and the citizens of the state, not to a board of directors."

Sittenfeld said his research, prompted by New York City's similar divestment, revealed a direct \$2.5 million investment from the city's pension system in G4S, a London-based security company. Other indirect investments were found to support CoreCivic and GEO Group, other companies with connections to private prisons

As of Dec. 2016, the city's pension fund had a market value of assets of \$2.22 billion.

According to a 2014 report from Vanity Fair, G4S is the third-largest employer in the world and sends private security forces all over the world in addition to involvement in private prisons in the U.S. and the U.K.

Omar Mateen was on the G4S payroll as a security guard, but was off-duty, when he opened fire at the Pulse club in Orlando killing 49 people.

During Barack Obama's administration, the Department of Justice moved to phase out the use of private prisons causing stocks in those companies to plummet.

However, Attorney General Jeff Sessions voiced the Trump administration support for privatization and rolled back Obama's plan.

In Cincinnati, Sasha Naiman with the Ohio Justice and Policy Center said the private prison population in Ohio has tripled in the past 15 years leading to more assaults and more recidivism.

"They are seeking a guarantee of certain occupancies, a guarantee that people's bodies will be in cages for their profit," Naiman said. "When profits are motivations, people's rights fall to the wayside."

The policy motion will be brought before Cincinnati City Council in the coming weeks and likely pass with at least a majority, but the city's pension board will have to agree with the decision for any divestment to occur.

Paula Tilsley, executive director of the board, said the board has not yet reviewed the policy motion.

"Input and direction from our policy makers is appreciated and taken seriously," she said in a statement explaining the board will consider the request once the motion passes council.

Divestment as a political act

This isn't the first time city council has asked the pension board to divest. In 1989, then-Councilman Reggie Williams with the support of mayor Charlie Luken filed a similar policy motion asked for divestment in South Africa and Namibia due to the practice of apartheid.

In that case, pressure for divestment started with public demands dating back to 1984. Cities across the country were joining the movement, and city institutions like Kroger, P&G, the University of Cincinnati followed suit.

The board, at first, refused to move the \$18 million citing fears they could be sued if pension fund's rate of return suffered.

Lawsuits were threatened, and eventually, the city ordered the board to completely divest by 1992, about two full years after Williams motion was filed.

Yes, Jerry Springer is 'considering' a run for Ohio governor

Published 11:44 a.m. ET Aug. 30, 2017 | Updated 5:24 p.m. ET Aug. 30, 2017

Jerry Springer is considering a run for Ohio governor after all, one of his closest friends told The Enquirer Wednesday.

"There have been who have asked him to run for governor, and he is considering it and will decide that pretty soon," said Northern Kentucky's Jene Galvin, who co-hosts a weekly podcast with Springer. "He's about done figuring it out, but he had to give some serious thought to it first."

The revelation comes after months of rumors and even denials by Springer. But the prospect was reignited last week after Springer asked some Cleveland Democrats: "Is it too late to enter the Ohio governor's race?"

Springer, a former Cincinnati mayor and tabloid talk show host, wanted feedback from Sen. Sandra Williams, a leader in the Cuyahoga County Democratic Party; and Democratic Reps. Janine Boyd and Stephanie Howse. Springer is talking with political consultants and polling the race but hasn't decided whether he'll enter the crowded gubernatorial field.

"I don't think it's too late for him to get into the race," Williams told The Enquirer.

Galvin said Springer would decide in the next two weeks.

Many unions and Democratic leaders have withheld their endorsements from the four current candidates until the field is set. Consumer Financial Protection Bureau Rich Cordray might enter the race as well.

Springer has two assets that other Democrats in the race sorely lack: Name recognition and money. Former state Rep. Connie Pillich, of Montgomery, led the Democrats in fundraising, but her haul was easily dwarfed by the \$4 million-plus that three Republican contenders have on hand.

"He has one thing that the others all crave and that's name recognition. Everyone knows who Jerry Springer is," Democratic political consultant Bill DeMora said.

Springer has denied any plans to run for governor in the past. He has also considered a bid for the U.S. House of Representatives, challenging Republican incumbent Brad Wenstrup. Democrats say Springer hasn't yet made up his mind. The Enquirer reached out to Springer Wednesday for comment.

After his consultation with the Democratic lawmakers, Springer spoke to a packed crowd at Nighttown, a Cleveland Heights jazz club and restaurant. Springer did not mention his gubernatorial aspirations in his 15-minute speech, instead focusing on encouraging the party faithful to have a message that appeals to Democratic values, Williams said.

Williams said Springer was well-received by the crowd, which was gathered for a fundraiser for Howse and Boyd, two sophomore legislators.

Boyd sees Springer as someone who could win the governor's race and compel Republicans to consider Democratic ideas on voting, criminal justice reform and money for public transportation.

"At this point, my Republican brothers and sisters, they don't need our insights. I would like for us to be in a position where they do," Boyd said.

Springer will return to Cleveland Monday for Service Employees International Union 1199's Labor Day rally, leading some Democrats to speculate that he is seeking the union's endorsement. He also plans to attend U.S. Rep. Marcia Fudge's picnic later that day.

Springer's fundraising prowess has benefitted Hamilton County Democrats for years. He has also been a regular speaker at events, including several gatherings for Democrats in other states during the Democratic National Convention.

"If Jerry decides to run for public office, I will do everything I can to support his candidacy," said Hamilton County Democratic Party Chairman Tim Burke. (Burke worked for Springer as a legislative assistant when Springer was on Cincinnati City Council.)

"Jerry is also a tremendous speaker and has the ability to really motivate a crowd," Burke said.

Springer's tough talk has been compared to another television star turned politician: President Donald Trump.

"I could be Trump without the racism," Springer told The Enquirer in February.

Henson, Libby

From: Cho, Joy
Sent: Thursday, August 24, 2017 9:39 AM
To: Westlake, Libby
Subject: RE: E-Clips for 8/24/2017
Attachments: E-Clips (8-24-17).docx

From: Westlake, Libby
Sent: Thursday, August 24, 2017 8:54 AM
To: Westlake, Libby <Libby.Westlake@ohiohouse.gov>
Subject: E-Clips for 8/24/2017

HOUSE E-CLIPS 8/24/2017

***AP* Associated Press**

ONLINE CHARTER SCHOOL IN LEGAL BATTLE SEEKS NEW DESIGNATION

The giant online charter school locked in a legal fight with Ohio officials over millions of dollars is moving to be designated as a dropout prevention school if the state approves that change.

SON OF EX-OHIO GOV. CELESTE BACKS DEMOCRAT BETTY SUTTON

The son of former Ohio Gov. Richard Celeste is backing Democrat Betty Sutton in next year's race for Ohio governor.

The Columbus Dispatch Ohio's Greatest Online Newspaper

OHIO DOCTORS TO DISCUSS ALTERNATIVES TO OPIOIDS TO TREAT PATIENTS' PAIN

An organization of physicians dedicated to treating patients' pain is coming together to discuss ways to help stem Ohio's opioid crisis.

ECOT MANEUVER MAY REPRESENT FINAL BID TO REMAIN OPEN

Facing the possibility of losing its sponsor and being forced to close, the Electronic Classroom of Tomorrow has launched a plan to go from a major drag on its sponsor's portfolio to a shining star — all without having to improve any of its lagging academic scores.

KASICH NOT AMONG 5 GOVERNORS CHOSEN TO TESTIFY BEFORE SENATE PANEL

Ohio Gov. John Kasich is not among the five governors scheduled to testify next month before a Senate committee seeking a fresh approach to stabilize the individual insurance market created by Obamacare.

MARY TAYLOR PROPOSES SIMPLER TAX SYSTEM FOR OHIOANS

Lt. Gov. Mary Taylor wants to deliver a "simpler, streamlined, customer-focused tax system" for Ohio taxpayers.

THE PLAIN DEALER

HITTING OHIO 16 WAYS: HOW A BAD CENSUS COUNT COULD COST OHIOANS

Counting the nation's population might seem easy.

WHO IS THE CONTROVERSIAL MAN BEHIND OHIO'S DRUG PRICE BALLOT INITIATIVE?

There's a war in Ohio over drug prices.

OHIO BILL WOULD REQUIRE PRISON FOR INTERNET SOLICITATION OF CHILDREN

A bipartisan bill in the Ohio legislature would guarantee people who solicit children for sex over the internet would spend time behind bars.

MARY TAYLOR TALKS TAXES IN TOLEDO: OHIO POLITICS ROUNDUP

Ohio Lt. Gov Mary Taylor, a Republican candidate for Ohio governor, talked tax reform in Toledo on Wednesday. Issue 2 received new support from two Cleveland City Council members.

THE BLADE

The of America's Great Newspapers

OHIO SENATOR WANTS DOGS ALLOWED IN OUTDOOR RESTAURANT AREAS

The Blarney Irish Pub in Toledo's Warehouse District gets just a few dogs on its outdoor patio each week, but it welcomes the animals along with their owners and would welcome a state law that would keep the government from infringing on their right to allow it.

GOVERNOR CANDIDATE MARY TAYLOR PROPOSES SIMPLIFIED TAX CODE

Calling complex tax rules one of the top complaints of Ohio small business owners, Republican governor candidate Mary Taylor on Wednesday promised to simplify the tax system in Ohio if she's elected.

EDITORIAL: DINING OUT GOES TO THE DOGS

Ohio restaurants may soon be able to welcome four-legged guests to their outdoor patio sections thanks to a bill in the General Assembly.

EDITORIAL: SELLING LIQUOR QUICKER A GOOD DEAL FOR OHIO MICRODISTILLERIES

Some local liquors may no longer have to run obstacle courses across Ohio to reach nearby bars.

HOUSE CLIPS



8/24/17

Online charter school in legal battle seeks new designation

Today

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — The giant online charter school locked in a legal fight with Ohio officials over millions of dollars is moving to be designated as a dropout prevention school if the state approves that change.

The Columbus Dispatch reports Electronic Classroom of Tomorrow board officials Tuesday approved switching the designation. A document says the change would begin immediately with the 2017-18 school year, but would be subject to state approval by December.

The newspaper reports ECOT officials declined to answer questions about the move following Tuesday's meeting.

Dropout recovery schools get a separate, much more lenient state report than traditional schools. The new designation also could allow ECOT to expand enrollment at a time when it's under an order by the state Department of Education to refund \$60 million for lax attendance.

Son of ex-Ohio Gov. Celeste backs Democrat Betty Sutton

July 24, 2017

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — The son of former Ohio Gov. Richard Celeste is backing Democrat Betty Sutton in next year's race for Ohio governor.

Christopher Celeste said Wednesday he'll co-chair the ex-congresswoman's campaign. The Columbus entrepreneur sided with Sutton over three other announced Democrats and a fourth considering a run.

Celeste's father also is a Democrat.

Christopher Celeste attributed his decision to what he called Sutton's experience, political tenacity and creativity in solving tough problems.

His support allows Sutton to broaden her economic message after earning 20 labor organizations' endorsement.

Celeste has spent years helping create, lead or launch projects including political action committees, tech startups, e-commerce websites and small-scale neighborhood developments.

He emailed supporters that he believes Sutton can “enthuse” Democrats and attract independent and Republican voters. He says early fundraising is key.

The Columbus Dispatch

Ohio's Greatest Online Newspaper

Ohio doctors to discuss alternatives to opioids to treat patients' pain

Posted at 5:39 AM, Updated at 5:39 AM

An organization of physicians dedicated to treating patients' pain is coming together to discuss ways to help stem Ohio's opioid crisis.

The Ohio Society of Interventional Pain Physicians holds its first annual meeting in Cincinnati from Friday to Sunday. Among subjects to be addressed are alternatives to opioids, ways to help people who become addicted and use of marijuana as a possible treatment for pain.

“The biggest thing is how to treat people appropriately, correctly,” said Dr. Ricardo Buenaventura, the society's president. “It's easy to give somebody a pain pill, but we realize that's not good for the long term for a significant portion of people.”

Some alternatives to opioids are non-opioid medications, injections, physical therapy and psychological counseling. Chiropractic treatment, massage, spinal-cord stimulation and surgery are also often used, he said.

The cost of insurance premiums or co-pays, however, often dissuade people from participating in such treatment, Buenaventura said. It's also challenging when patients expect to be cured from conditions such as arthritis, for which there is no cure.

On the one hand, some doctors are criticized for not helping a patient when they don't prescribe opioids, said Michelle Byers, event organizer. On the other, doctors are also criticized for contributing to the opioid problem when they do prescribe the medications.

“The physician is in a can't-win situation,” Byers said. “It's a really, really tough situation.”

Speakers include Dr. Amol Soin, president of the State Medical Board; Dr. Kent Harshbarger, Montgomery County coroner; and, journalist Sam Quinones, who wrote about the opioid crisis in his book “Dreamland: The True Tale of America's Opiate Epidemic.”

Army veteran Justin Minyard will also tell the story of his active-duty injury, addiction to opioids and overcoming addiction with alternative forms of pain therapies.

"We think we can do a lot of education and physician outreach to help with prescribing patterns and to help recognize problems with pain medications, addiction and over-prescribing, also pitfalls for physicians to avoid," said Soin, who is CEO of the society.

Opioids first received a lot of publicity about 20 years ago, amid a culture that believed pain should be treated more aggressively and physicians being told the drugs weren't addictive. As a consequence, doctors prescribed them liberally.

Often the prescriptions led to addictions. At times, young people found them in medicine cabinets. Many addicts who lost access to pills turned to heroin and the far more potent fentanyl and carfentanil, synthetic opioids.

The addictions have led to an unprecedented drug epidemic. Last year in the United States, 52,000 people died of drug overdoses; almost two-thirds of those deaths were from prescription or illegal opioids.

The number of drug-abuse deaths rivals the number of U.S. troops killed in the Vietnam War, Buenaventura said.

"We certainly are in the midst of a crisis," he said. "Yet people aren't up in arms about this as much, so it needs to be brought to people's awareness."

The annual meeting will be held at the Westin Hotel on Fountain Square at 21 E. 5th St. in Cincinnati.

Registration is available on site. For more information or to register in advance, email

MichelleHByers@gmail.com or visit

<https://www.regonline.com/registration/Checkin.aspx?EventID=1967722>.

ECOT maneuver may represent final bid to remain open

Posted at 5:54 AM, Updated at 5:54 AM

acing the possibility of losing its sponsor and being forced to close, the Electronic Classroom of Tomorrow has launched a plan to go from a major drag on its sponsor's portfolio to a shining star — all without having to improve any of its lagging academic scores.

If the maneuver works, both ECOT and the sponsor could dodge being put out of business because of the online school's persistently low student test scores.

ECOT, one of the state's largest charter schools, now wants to immediately become a "dropout recovery" charter school. That's significant because, if approved by the state, ECOT would be evaluated under a more-lenient set of academic standards. For example, its sub-40 percent graduation rate would instantly go from a state grade of F to an A.

And that likely means that ECOT no longer would drag its sponsor to an "ineffective" rating for a third straight year — forcing it to face closure under state law.

Keeping ECOT's sponsor, the Educational Service Center of Lake Erie West, alive also would save 31 other charters that the Toledo-area center sponsors. ECOT's performance affects its sponsor so drastically because its enrollment is roughly equal to that of the other Lake Erie West charter schools combined.

"With so many students, it would have been really tough for Lake Erie West to have it in its portfolio," said Chad Aldis, the Thomas B. Fordham Institute's vice president for Ohio policy and advocacy.

ECOT's plan apparently would not impact a separate, ongoing fight with the Department of Education, which ordered the school to repay \$60 million for unverified enrollment for one year, with other years still under investigation.

Rep. Andrew Brenner, R-Powell, the House Education Committee chairman, warned of the looming crisis when he floated unsuccessful budget amendments last spring that would have lessened the impact that large e-schools like ECOT had on sponsors, the supposed taxpayer "watchdogs" over charters.

"I've been suggesting this to them for a couple years," Brenner said of the switch. "I think this is something they probably needed to do because that is a lot of the student demographics they've been dealing with."

ECOT's superintendent and board president wouldn't discuss the motives for the move following a board meeting Tuesday, and ECOT spokesman Neil Clark didn't respond Wednesday to repeated requests for comment.

No one from Lake Erie West would agree to be interviewed, but the sponsor issued a written statement through an attorney that said, "generally speaking," it has concerns about academic scores on its sponsor evaluation, and it is working to promote academic growth and achievement in its sponsored schools. But ECOT approached it with the plan to switch designations, not vice versa.

An agreement OK'd Tuesday by the ECOT board notes a state decision of its request is not expected until December. The agreement allows Lake Erie West to change its sponsorship agreement with ECOT if it loses its bid to become a dropout recovery school.

Such a designation, Aldis said, may be appropriate for ECOT, which has long said its student population includes a number of struggling and non-traditional high school students.

But if the school is able to improve its grades and keep its sponsor simply by switching designations, "This is going to shine a light on how well the state evaluates dropout recovery schools," Aldis said. "My biggest concern is it doesn't look at how well a good dropout recovery school should be serving its students."

"Dropout recovery schools have been a major embarrassment to Ohio for years," said Stephen Dyer of the liberal research group Innovation Ohio. "And they are the recipients of one of the last bastions of legislative loopholes for politically connected charter school operators."

Dropout recovery schools generally boost sponsors ratings. That's because even by getting a middle grade of "meets expectations," it will do better on "the sponsor rating system than probably 80 percent or more of charter schools in the state," Aldis said. "That means they are a school you would want in your portfolio, not shy away from."

That dynamic, he said, speaks to the need to further alter the state's report-card and sponsor-evaluation systems. Aldis has pressed for student progress to count more, something that was put into the two-year budget but vetoed by Gov. John Kasich.

In 2015-16, dropout charters enrolled about 16,000 students. ECOT's stated enrollment of 13,800 would almost double that.

"Is there a need for such a large program to enter that field? Again, it's a classic example of something that's hard to respond to, just because I think there are aspects of school choice and student circumstances that make it hard to (know) how you might actually gauge need," state Superintendent Paolo DeMaria said.

Now wanting to help dropouts, ECOT has been criticized over the years for contributing massively to Ohio's dropout problem.

The Dispatch reported in 2016 that one of every six high school dropouts in Ohio came from ECOT, and The New York Times found that more students drop out or fail to finish high school at ECOT within four years than at any school in the nation.

The number of ECOT students who didn't graduate in four years — 2,790 last year — is more than three times higher than the total for Cleveland City Schools, which had the lowest four-year graduation rate of Ohio's big urban districts. ECOT's five-year graduation rate is 44 percent, compared with a state average of 85 percent.

Kasich not among 5 governors chosen to testify before Senate panel

Posted Aug 23, 2017 at 1:42 PM, Updated Aug 23, 2017 at 4:09 PM

Ohio Gov. John Kasich is not among the five governors scheduled to testify next month before a Senate committee seeking a fresh approach to stabilize the individual insurance market created by Obamacare.

The Senate Health, Education and Labor Committee instead said Wednesday Republican Govs. Charlie Baker of Massachusetts, Bill Haslam of Tennessee and Gary Herbert of Utah along with Democratic Govs. John Hickenlooper of Colorado and Steve Bullock of Montana will testify on fixing the 2010 Affordable Care Act.

Kasich and Hickenlooper are expected to unveil a plan next week to curb the rapidly rising costs of federally subsidized insurance plans made available through Obamacare. Kasich sharply criticized the Republican-backed health-care bill that died last month in the Senate.

"It's great that Congress will be able to learn about health care reform from those who have firsthand experience doing it. We look forward to sharing a bipartisan blueprint with Congress on ways we can stabilize markets, preserve coverage and control costs," said Kasich spokesman Jon Keeling.

The Senate committee is chaired by Sen. Lamar Alexander, R-Tenn., and the ranking Democrat is Patty Murray of Washington.

Mary Taylor proposes simpler tax system for Ohioans

Posted Aug 23, 2017 at 1:36 PM, Updated Aug 23, 2017 at 1:40 PM

Lt. Gov. Mary Taylor wants to deliver a "simpler, streamlined, customer-focused tax system" for Ohio taxpayers.

The Republican gubernatorial candidate proposed changes to the state's tax system on Wednesday in remarks to the tax committee of the Toledo Regional Chamber of Commerce.

Noting the Kasich-Taylor administration has reduced taxes by about \$5 billion over the past six years, Taylor proposed:

- Reducing the state income tax form to the size of a postcard. The 2016 individual income tax form could run 11 pages long with 60 pages of instructions and a simpler filing system will save both taxpayers and the state money, she said. Taylor shared no details how that would happen. “Some of the detail of the mechanics will continue to be fleshed out working with stakeholders and other tax experts,” said campaign spokesman Michael Duchesne.
- Adjusting income tax withholding tables to allow Ohioans to keep more of their money as they are paid. Current tables withhold about 20 percent more than needed to cover tax liabilities, extending an interest-free loan to the state, Taylor said. Such an adjustment would result in smaller refunds when Ohioans file their taxes.
- Changing policies to not punish Ohioans with interest and penalties for tax errors when they make “good-faith efforts” to comply.
- Creating a “taxpayer advocacy office,” independent of the Department of Taxation, to help Ohioans comply with tax laws and advocate for changes when taxpayers are treated unfairly.

“I’m excited about this proposal as it directly affects the bottom line for Ohio families whose concerns have become my calling,” said Taylor, a CPA and former state auditor. “This is an effort to get the tax system out of the way of creating jobs.”

Attorney General Mike DeWine, Secretary of State Jon Husted and U.S. Rep. Jim Renacci, R-Wadsworth, also are running for the GOP nomination for governor in the May 8 primary next year.

THE PLAIN DEALER

Hitting Ohio 16 ways: How a bad census count could cost Ohioans

Posted August 24, 2017 at 07:16 AM, Updated August 24, 2017 at 07:19 AM

Counting people is hard, and controversial, too

WASHINGTON -- Counting the nation's population might seem easy. Yet U.S. census takers find it harder every 10 years to get people to return their surveys or open their doors and answer questions about incomes, jobs, family size and race, even though respondents' identities are kept anonymous.

The U.S. Census Bureau wants to update its methods with high-tech data-collection tools for the 2020 headcount. President Donald Trump and conservative Republicans in Congress don't want to boost the bureau's budget much for this, noting heavy spending for the 2010 census and cost overruns for an electronic data system already under development. The bureau's director, John H. Thompson, resigned in May and has not been replaced.

The Census Project, an organization that includes cities, states, mayors and state legislators, says the government needs to spend \$1.8 billion next year to help the Census Bureau gear up for 2020 and test new methods and technologies. Trump only requested \$1.524 billion, and Congress appears to be settling close to that number as it tries to resolve budget questions by late September. That's slightly higher than the \$1.47 billion Congress approved for the current year.

This matters because federal agencies send money to states -- for social welfare programs, roads, payments to doctors -- based on populations and incomes. If the count is bad in the decennial census and in follow-up supplemental surveys, the state can get shortchanged. Some people may see that as a good way to cut federal spending. But the spending is driven by laws already on the books, and the laws can only be carried out fully with a good count.

What's at stake for Ohio? The Counting for Dollars Project at George Washington University's Institute of Public Policy examined how 16 major federal programs used census information -- specifically, data sets that the government derived from the traditional headcount -- when sending money to states in 2015. Here's how the count worked out for Ohioans, and why the 2020 census will matter.

-- Stephen Koff, cleveland.com Washington bureau chief

Medicaid

Medicaid covers the cost of health care for low-income Americans. The federal government shares the cost with states, and the feds sent nearly \$11.3 billion to Ohio for Medicaid in fiscal year 2015.

Here's where the census comes in: The federal share is determined partly by factoring in each state's per-capita income. The higher the income, the more prosperous the residents -- which means that under the law, the state can afford to pick up a bigger share.

Per-capita income simply means a state's total income, based on Commerce Department data, divide by the population of the state.

If the census count was too low because the Census Bureau had to cut corners, that could show Ohio having fewer people -- and in turn, it would make Ohio's per-capita income look higher. That would mean the feds, who now pay 62.3 cents of every Medicaid dollar in Ohio (not counting a higher share for some residents under the Affordable Care Act), would recalculate what it pays -- and the state could have to pick up a larger share, said Andrew Reamer, a George Washington University research professor.

Food stamps

The federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, provided \$2.5 billion to help low-income Ohio families buy groceries in 2015. Eligibility is based on household size, expenses and income.

But a separate calculation, using the number of people counted by the Census Bureau and jobs data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, helps determine another facet of the food stamp program. SNAP requires most able-bodied adults who have no dependents to work after a certain period of time, but states can waive the work requirement in regions where the unemployment rate is unusually high because it's harder to find work where there are fewer jobs available.

Yet unemployment data in each county is based partly on each county's population -- and a miscount in the decennial census would increase the likelihood of a less accurate unemployment count. This could harm a county's eligibility for a waiver, George Washington University said.

Medicare doctor payments

Medicare, the federal health insurance program for seniors, determines how much to pay doctors by using "Geographic Practice Cost Indices," or the cost of running a doctor's office. The indices come in part from surveys that are based on the census. They cover such things as office rents, the cost of supplies and equipment and payroll expenses.

If the census data is wrong on costs in a particular area, the geographical index -- and the amount a doctor should be paid -- might be off.

Medicare Part B, which pays for doctor's services, sent slightly over \$2 billion to Ohio physicians in 2015.

Highways

Except for the odd case of a bridge to nowhere, federal highway money tends follow need. And a need for good roads often correlates with population.

In fact, says George Washington University, five transportation programs -- the National Highway System Component, Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement, Metropolitan Planning, Surface Transportation, and Equity Bonus -- use census-derived data such as population, urban population and median income.

This helped Ohio get \$1.4 billion in federal highway funds in 2015.

If Ohio's population was undercounted in the 2020 census, the state could be shortchanged in highway money, too. This could especially affect cities, because local population is factored into the distribution.

Chuck Crow, The Plain Dealer

Section 8 housing vouchers

Section 8 provides rent vouchers so low-income families have places to live.

But how do you define low-income in any particular region? How do you know what median rents are so you can determine which apartments and rents qualify?

These and other metrics come from the census. A miscount could result in inaccurate estimates of housing need, thresholds for renters' incomes and average rents by size of apartment. It could put the value of vouchers out of whack with the reality of the rental market.

Ohio landlords got \$556.6 million in Section 8 Housing Choice vouchers in 2015.

Money for schools

Congress recognizes that schools can have teaching challenges when they enroll high concentrations of students from poor families, so it provides extra money for the Department of Education to distribute to these local districts. These are called Title 1 grants, and they use four formulas -- with poverty as the major gauge -- to determine how much money to provide.

If the census is wrong on a school district's or census tract's poverty, the grants will be too small or too large.

Ohio schools got nearly \$566 million in Title 1 grants in 2015.

School lunches

Students from low-income families qualify for free or reduced-price lunches at school or community centers. The cutoff for free lunches is 130 percent of the poverty level, or \$31,980 for a family of four, but students whose parents earn up to \$45,510 in a family of four can get reduced-price lunches.

Census data determines how National School Lunch Program money is distributed, so undercounts could affect the distribution.

Ohio got \$350.5 million in school lunch money in 2015.

And more

OK, you get the idea, and we won't belabor it. But for the record, George Washington University also calculated that the census played a role in Ohio getting the following sums in 2015:

- \$431.6 million in special education grants tied in part to the number of children living in poverty, based on the census.
- \$432.8 million in payments for medical care for children in the State Children's Health Insurance Program, which bases its allocation partly on the number of children in poverty.
- \$459.8 million for public housing agencies to provide rental assistance for low-income families who live in apartments owned by the housing agencies. Called Project-based Section 8, this is related to the other Section 8 program mentioned already, but with different sums and different landlords, and it too uses census data for allocation.
- \$323.7 million for Head Start/Early Start, which promotes school readiness and distributes its money based on a state's number of children in low-income households.

The George Washington University analysis also looked at the Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (\$164.3 million for Ohio); assistance for foster care (\$204.8 million for Ohio); health centers for underserved communities (\$122.2 million); low-income energy assistance, which many seniors rely on to help pay utility bills (\$148.3 million for Ohio), and child care and development assistance for low-income families so parents can work, attend school or get training (\$130.1 million for Ohio).

What it all means

We have now mentioned 16 programs. Each of them relies on an accurate census, whether the big one taken every ten years or in annual, supplemental surveys that are based in part on the decennial count and are used to measure other population and demographic patterns.

Shortchanging the 2020 headcount could do more than affect the redrawing of the nation's congressional districts, which is what many Americans think the census is for. It could also shortchange the Ohioans who rely on funding that flows from the data, be they physicians or students, according to Census Bureau supporters.

That may be fine with lawmakers who want to cut government spending or who find the census too intrusive. The census certainly has its critics.

But it helps to know when you hear the debate: This is about much more than counting people.

Who is the controversial man behind Ohio's drug price ballot initiative?

Updated on August 24, 2017 at 8:09 AM, Posted on August 24, 2017 at 6:20 AM

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- There's a war in Ohio over drug prices.

Supporters and opponents of the Ohio Drug Price Relief Act - a ballot issue Ohioans will decide this November -- have waged an aggressive, multimillion-dollar offensive against one another. Both sides are carpetbombing the airwaves with television and digital advertising trying to bring voters to their side.

It could end up being the most expensive ballot initiative Ohio has ever seen.

But it wasn't Ohioans who started this war.

Instead, the first shots came from the heart of Los Angeles.

'I speak truth to power'

If the ballot initiative is a war in Ohio, the general for the pro-side - known as Ohio Taxpayers for Lower Drug Prices - is Michael Weinstein, the polarizing and controversial president of the AIDS Healthcare Foundation, or AHF, which occupies the 21st floor of an office building near the corner of Sunset Boulevard and Vine Street in Hollywood.

So far, his nonprofit has funded nearly the entire \$6 million to the Ohio campaign, including \$3.7 million in the last six months and the money to pay collectors to gather the 300,000-plus signatures that were needed to get the issue on the ballot.

Opponents of the ballot initiative - known as Ohioans Against the Deceptive Rx Issue - are completely funded by the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America - or PhRMA.

And they've tried to make much of this battle about Weinstein himself, labeling him a "California health care CEO" and criticizing the way AHF raises hundreds of millions of dollars in revenue by buying pharmaceuticals at a discount and reselling them. And for using his large, powerful organization to wage political and legal battles.

"He's not on your side," one ad states bluntly.

But Weinstein is a nuanced character, who identified with the radical left during his youth in the 70s, eventually becoming the head of a global AIDS treatment empire with ambitions of changing the modern health care landscape entirely. He and his organization's work are often praised for their innovative approach to treating AIDS and HIV, but also condemned for radical views and militant tactics.

"If militant means I'm willing to fight very hard for people in need, then I'll certainly embrace it," Weinstein said in an interview with cleveland.com.

By most accounts, AHF is a leader in AIDS prevention and treatment, increasing access to both preventive measures and treatment for HIV and AIDS.

The group serves more than 775,000 patients daily, and a report from the organization states it performed more than 131,000 HIV tests and distributed nearly 10 million condoms annually in the United States alone. Weinstein estimated the total number of patients treated by the foundation at more than 1.5 million.

It's not just the United States where AHF is combating the problem. While the foundation has a presence in 15 states and the District of Columbia, its footprint extends to 39 countries. That includes a large presence in Africa, where it began providing treatment to patients even before the initiatives of President George W. Bush took effect.

And while Weinstein lives in California, AHF is present in Ohio. Amid hard times stemming from the 2008 recession, the AHF saved the AIDS Taskforce of Greater Cleveland, joining forces with them in 2013.

The group runs a pharmacy in Cleveland, a thrift store in downtown Columbus, a clinic at Mt. Carmel Hospital in Columbus and a satellite office in Zanesville.

"I think a great deal of my success has come from the fact I haven't worried much about what people say about me," Weinstein said. "You know, I speak truth to power. You can't call that a bully. I think that the results of my work speak for themselves."

'The more successful we are, the more lives we can save'

Weinstein described himself as a "child of the '60s" and had no qualms about sharing his past, which included a tour as one of the heads of a far-left organization with a sordid background.

In 1974 he founded the Lavender and Red Union, a Marxist organization that eventually merged with the Trotskyite Spartacist League. During his time with the Spartacist League, he was an editorial board member for Young Spartacus, one of the group's periodicals.

The group published a number of questionable opinions, including a February 1978 defense of the director Roman Polanski, who fled the United States after being charged with drugging and raping a 13-year-old girl.

The decision to leave the group "wasn't just one thing," Weinstein said, describing the Spartacist League as cult-like. "I was just highly offended for women who suffered and children who suffered through sexual abuse that an organization that was supposed to be defending people's rights would take that position. I was extremely offended by that."

A profile in The New York Times described this as the turning point for Weinstein, but he stayed on for another year. An advertisement in a June 1979 issue promoted Weinstein as the speaker at a Spartacist League forum on the "bigotry" of age of consent laws.

"I have no recollection of that. Boy, they had to dig deep for that," Weinstein said, referring to the PR campaign against him.

"Doesn't that tell you something as a news outlet that one of the largest industries in the country is going to make this a referendum on me?" Weinstein asked. "Doesn't that tell you something? They're running ads in the state that talk about me as a health executive. They don't mention AIDS. They don't mention nonprofit. They don't mention 770,000 people in care."

It's true that Weinstein's opponents have dug up almost anything they can on him, but most of it is barely a secret. Weinstein's been a controversial figure in the HIV/AIDS treatment community for years now. He's been criticized for engaging in homophobia - even as a gay man - and stunting progress combating HIV - even as the head of AHF.

"I am consistently angered and confused and disgusted by his prevention campaigns, which seem to encourage a stigma against homosexuality," Cleve Jones, a prominent AIDS activist, said in a 2016 LA Weekly piece. "I don't know of anyone who agrees with him or claims to understand what his motivation is."

At times, Weinstein's views run directly counter to popular opinion on treating and preventing HIV. He's adamantly opposed to PrEP, a daily pill that can prevent HIV infection.

He's unapologetic about it.

"Its proven effectiveness is for an individual, not for public health overall," Weinstein said. "It's been approved for five years now by the FDA. Few people are on it. Adherence to it is spotty. The people who are on it are not the people who are most at risk."

Weinstein might be most famous - or infamous - for his willingness to throw his organization's weight around. He's turned to the courts multiple times in his past, and even his fellow AIDS activists have decried some of his decisions.

Weinstein's first foray into Ohio came in 2011 when the state was trying to institute a priority list for HIV-positive patients and federal funding, known as Ryan White Part B funding. At the time, there was a backlog of patients needing treatment and a state task force was ready to propose a rule change granting funding on the basis of need - the sickest individuals would receive care first.

Until AHF sued, arguing it should be first-come, first-served.

"They wanted to deny anyone who didn't have full blown AIDS access to drugs and we objected to it," Weinstein said. "They had a waiting list and said they'd give it to people who were sickest." Treatment shouldn't be reserved for just the sickest people, he said.

AHF has a reputation in the HIV/AIDS community of forcefully pursuing legal recourse any time something doesn't go its way, regardless of the outcome for other organizations.

"There's a long history of when (AHF doesn't) get their way or lose their funding, they're very, very litigious," said Bill Hardy, president and CEO of Equitas Health, an Ohio-based provider of AIDS and HIV treatment.

Hardy said he thinks that's because the bulk of AHF's funding comes from the Ryan White money - which allows pharmacies and organizations approved for the grant to get discounted rates on drugs.

Those discounted drugs are AHF's bread and butter and account for the bulk of its revenue - \$924 million in 2016. The discounted rates allow AHF to bill insurers, Medicare, Medicaid and other programs at higher rates, raising revenue that is then reinvested in the foundation.

That model has rubbed some people the wrong way, who accuse Weinstein of running the operation more like a business than a nonprofit.

But it has allowed the organization to grow at an exponential rate.

"The more successful we are, the more lives we can save," Weinstein said, noting it doesn't turn anyone away and he makes a relatively meager salary of \$409,000 compared with nonprofit and private CEOs of the same size. "And I don't know exactly what it means. If it means that we are careful financially and that we are growth oriented, for sure. But to say we're operating like a business, we're certainly very mission driven."

Expanded coverage from the Affordable Care Act, especially the Medicaid expansion, ended the need for a waitlist in Ohio, resolving most of the 2011 suit without a court's ruling.

The 2011 case isn't an outlier. AHF is not afraid to flex its muscles in court, filing numerous lawsuits over the course of a decade around the country whenever Ryan White funding comes under threat.

That can have dramatic effects on smaller agencies. Ryan White funding is just as crucial to small organizations as it is to a Goliath like AHF.

Smaller organizations are often left in limbo, unable to add new patients or increase care, while funding is tied up in AHF's legal battles.

The AIDS Task Force of Greater Cleveland - and, by extension, AHF - is still involved in legal battles over Ryan White funding in Ohio. It is suing the Ohio Department of Health after being denied the funding for 2017 when it missed the filing deadline.

The 2017 suit held up \$560,000 meant for HIV case management, including \$178,000 for Equitas, though a judge recently overruled AHF's petition for a temporary restraining order.

Weinstein described it as something of means to an end.

"Probably 80 percent of these cases that we've done against local jurisdictions in procurement lead to outright victories or settlements," he said. "Once we've established our place we've developed good relationships."

But setting up shop often comes with some gnashing of teeth.

In 2012, Weinstein returned to Ohio to open one of his Out of the Closet thrift stores. The design rankled some Columbus officials, and Weinstein said the city wasn't "gay-friendly" after a protracted argument over the downtown store.

The store finally opened after a redesign, and Weinstein said it's been a success.

"We have really had a tremendous success and great relationship in Columbus," Weinstein said.

"We're the busiest testing site. We work with Columbus Public Health. They really helped us to grow our outpatient HIV clinic."

'Is anyone else lined up to take this abuse?'

AHF wasn't always involved in the constant struggles and legal battles. Initially, it started as hospice care.

But as the AIDS drug cocktail - which reduces the effects of the disease - was developed, Weinstein said he felt the need for his organization to evolve.

That evolution eventually grew to include politics.

In recent years, Weinstein's organization has spearheaded multiple ballot initiatives. A successful 2012 ballot initiative - Measure B - was the first major success of AHF, gaining national attention because of its subject matter: requiring pornographic film performers to wear condoms in scenes shot in Los Angeles County.

Not all of Weinstein's initiative proposals have been health-related. In 2017, he spearheaded a Los Angeles County initiative to put a moratorium on high-rise building construction.

The initiative - Measure S - was about homelessness, Weinstein said. Construction in Los Angeles was closing homeless shelters, leaving people to fend for themselves.

"If you can't keep a roof over your head, the biggest social determinant of health is housing," Weinstein said. "Our patients are becoming increasingly homeless."

But some critics said it had more to do with Weinstein's personal comfort. A building going up across the street would have blocked Weinstein's view of the "Hollywood" sign.

Weinstein called that assertion "silly," especially since AHF already had a lawsuit against the company planning condominiums. (The two sides eventually reached a settlement.)

Still, many publicly criticized Weinstein for using AHF money to fund his pet political projects.

"They try to make a big issue of how much we spend on these campaigns, but it's a tiny fraction," Weinstein said. "We can walk and chew gum at the same time. At the same time we're running these campaigns, we'll add about 120,000 new patients worldwide."

The initiative lost by a 2-to-1 margin in March.

It was in 2012 that Weinstein also got involved in drug pricing. AHF backed Measure D in San Francisco, which was supposed to "use all available opportunities to reduce the city's cost of prescription drugs."

It won overwhelmingly with more than 80 percent of the vote, but nobody seemed to care.

"It really had very few teeth in it," Weinstein said. "(PhRMA) didn't bother opposing it. That's why we did so well."

Weinstein's goals grew loftier as he planned to take both of his successful local initiatives statewide. His condoms initiative made it to the ballot in 2016, as did the California Drug Price Relief Act.

The Ohio issue is almost identical to the California Drug Price Relief Act with the story playing out much the same way. Weinstein - or, more accurately, AHF - spent \$19 million to get it passed, but the initiative ultimately failed on the ballot 54-46 percent after PhRMA spent \$109 million to defeat it. Nearly every major newspaper editorial board came out against it, as did statewide and veterans organizations.

Weinstein didn't see the California result as a failure, but a success after being outspent five-to-one.

Weinstein's interest in drug pricing is ideologically driven by what he feels are transgressions by the drug companies against the people. The issue is so important, he said, that he's willing to be the lightning rod for the drug companies' attacks and take no prisoners in his crusade to lower prices.

"Is anyone else lined up to take this abuse? I don't think so," he said. "... But the bottom line is myself and this organization, we're willing to take on one of the most ferocious industries in this country."

His opponents - the drug companies - have done far worse, he said.

'Basically, they are a drug cartel'

In what's largely amounted to a public relations battle, Weinstein could hardly have picked a better enemy. Drug companies are far from popular. Polls show nearly half of the country thinks drug companies are failing their customers and three-quarters think the price of brand name drugs is unreasonable.

Numerous pharmaceutical companies opposing the initiative have been fined billions of dollars over the years for shady practices, including kickbacks and mislabeling of medication. Of the top 20 civil and criminal settlements against drug companies, PhRMA's members are responsible for 16, totaling more than \$15.5 billion.

Weinstein also pointed to skyrocketing drug prices, citing Turing Pharmaceuticals CEO Martin Shkreli - who raised the price of a drug to treat toxoplasmosis by 4,000 percent and was recently convicted of fraud - or Mylan CEO Heather Bresch - who increased the price of EpiPen by 400 percent.

"If the Ohio electorate knows that the 'No' campaign is being run by the drug companies, they will vote yes, and the drug companies know that," Weinstein said. "The drug companies know that the only way they can win this campaign is by concealing the fact that they're the opposition."

But the opposition campaign isn't just PhRMA. Like in California, dozens of statewide medical organizations, veterans coalitions, chambers of commerce and advocacy organizations are all signed up on the "No" side.

That wide assortment of organizations has warned of higher drug costs, reduced access to medicine and lawsuits over implementation.

Weinstein has his supporters too - most notably U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders of Vermont and former Ohio state Sen. Nina Turner - but no statewide organizations back his plan.

How then, did so many groups come to oppose Weinstein's ballot initiative? It all comes back to PhRMA, Weinstein said.

"By and large, (the) pharmaceutical industry always wins because they have an unlimited amount of money," Weinstein said. "Basically, they are a drug cartel and they have specialized in dirty tricks and they've specialized in bribing people. If you follow the money of all these people who (they) are getting to back them, you'll find the money connection."

And the possible consequences of the issue that the opposition is laying out - high prices and endless litigation - are nothing more than PhRMA holding a gun to voters' heads, he says.

"I will go anywhere at any time to debate any of the drug company CEOs that are behind this No campaign. We will buy the time. AHF and the campaign, we will buy the time and televise it," he said.

'There will be a revolt'

Until those final votes are tallied, Ohio is stuck in the middle of this battle of ideas. Weinstein on one side wanting to take down drug pricing. PhRMA on the other, ready to use its massive war chest to combat their nemesis.

If all goes according to Weinstein's plan, Ohio works as the first state in a domino theory of reducing drug pricing.

After all, the saying is, "As Ohio goes, so goes the nation."

"Drug prices will come down. There will be a revolt," Weinstein said. "The question is how long will it take. The sooner we can make that happen, the sooner we can stop having senior citizens cutting their pills in half or people choosing between food and medicine."

Ohio bill would require prison for internet solicitation of children

Updated on August 23, 2017 at 4:57 PM, Posted on August 23, 2017 at 4:47 PM

COLUMBUS, Ohio - A bipartisan bill in the Ohio legislature would guarantee people who solicit children for sex over the internet would spend time behind bars.

Bill sponsors Reps. Kent Smith, a Euclid Democrat, and Tim Schaffer, a Lancaster Republican, said judges too often place people who plead guilty to the crime (called importuning) on probation. The convicted return home, buy new computers and create new social media accounts to find new children, said the lawmakers, who said they were going to file the paperwork late Wednesday to introduce the measure in the General Assembly.

The penalties for importuning will remain the same.

People who pursue children under age 13 are convicted of a third-degree felony and judges can lock them up for nine to 36 months. Under the new bill, judges would have to sentence them to a minimum of nine months in prison.

For children ages 13 to 15, it's a fifth-degree felony. Currently judges can incarcerate them for six to 12 months. The minimum mandatory sentence under the new bill would be six months.

If there is an age gap within 10 years, for instance if the perpetrator is 19 and the victim is 15, judges would still have sentencing discretion.

In addition to guaranteeing people are properly punished for the crime, Schaffer hopes the threat of incarceration will deter some would-be sex criminals.

This isn't the first time the bill has been considered. Last legislative session, it passed the Ohio House, 95 to zero but died in the Senate. Schaffer said there wasn't enough time to educate senators on the issue before the session ended.

Schaffer has worked on legislation to protect children from becoming sex crime victims for well over a decade. At the same time, Smith prosecuted importuning cases in Cuyahoga County, where he tracked 10 cases between 2012 to 2014 in which people were sentenced to probation.

That's why the two lawmakers came together on the bill.

"We showed the same passion, even though we didn't know each other 10-12 years ago," Schaffer said.

The bill has the support of law enforcement and the Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence.

Smith said an effort is underway to educate judges on the cases, which are relatively new and appear to be on the rise with increased use of social media.

Mary Taylor talks taxes in Toledo: Ohio Politics Roundup

Updated on August 24, 2017 at 6:21 AM, Posted on August 24, 2017 at 6:20 AM

Ohio Lt. Gov Mary Taylor, a Republican candidate for Ohio governor, talked tax reform in Toledo on Wednesday. Issue 2 received new support from two Cleveland City Council members. Read more in today's Ohio Politics Roundup.

Taylor's tax plan: Ohio Republican gubernatorial candidate Mary Taylor said Wednesday in Toledo that she plans to simplify Ohio's tax code and shrink tax forms down to the size of a postcard, Toledo Blade reporter Tom Troy writes.

"We have listened to our business and individual taxpayers and proposed changes they have told us will move the needle for Ohio," Ohio's lieutenant governor said.

"She said there's still a need to streamline the tax process," Troy writes. "According to Ms. Taylor the 1972 individual income tax return was the size of a postcard, and the instructions were 18 pages long. The 2016 individual income tax return was 11 full-size pages, with 60 pages of instructions."

"I am, of course, well aware that many taxes are now filed electronically, but that does not change the importance of this effort," Taylor said. "Simplifying the filing requirements and reducing the burden on taxpayers is just as vital for electronic filers as for paper filers."

Issue 2 fan club: Cleveland City Council President Kevin Kelley and Councilwoman Phyllis Cleveland have come out in support of Issue 2, a November ballot measure supporters say would save the state millions of dollars on prescription drugs, cleveland.com's Laura Hancock writes.

"The proposed law would require Ohio to buy medicine for state health care recipients such as prisoners, Medicaid recipients or state employees at the same prices obtained by the U.S. Department

of Veterans Affairs, which under federal law gets a 24 percent discount on drug costs. VA officials can obtain additional discounts with individual drug makers," Hancock writes.

"About 4 million Ohio residents would be directly affected if the measure passes. Proponents say the savings to taxpayers would be \$400 million a year, a figure disputed by opponents."

Watch Cleveland mayoral candidates: Trying to decide which candidate to support in Cleveland's mayoral race?

The editorial board for cleveland.com and The Plain Dealer sat down with Mayor Frank Jackson and seven challengers to learn more about their vision for the city.

"During the 90-minute session, the candidates touched on a broad range of issues, from the condition of neighborhoods to whether Cleveland should create a \$15-an-hour minimum wage or commit tax dollars for upgrades at Quicken Loans Arena," cleveland.com's Robert Higgs writes. "Joining Jackson were Councilman Jeff Johnson, Councilman Zack Reed, former nonprofit executive Robert Kilo, businessman Tony Madalone, state Rep. Bill Patmon, restaurateur Brandon Chrostowski and Dyrone Smith. Former East Cleveland Mayor Eric Brewer did not participate."

Watch video of what the candidates had to say here.

On the ground: The Ohio Republican Party on Wednesday named six field directors to lead voter outreach efforts across the state.

The regional field directors include: Riley Mahoney, Debbie Pettit, J.R. Marshall, McKenzie Watt, Brandon Llewellyn and Ryan Nichols.

New job: Former state Sen. Lou Gentile has joined Vorys Advisors in Columbus, a government relations and policy firm.

Gentile, a Democrat and Steubenville native, in November lost his re-election bid, 53 percent to 47 percent, for the state Senate seat that represents Jefferson and nine other counties in Southeast Ohio.

Sutton's new guy: Ohio Democratic gubernatorial candidate Betty Sutton announced that Christopher Celeste will serve as co-chair of her campaign. Celeste is the son of former Ohio Gov. Dick Celeste.

"Make no mistake, as Democrats we are blessed with a strong field of primary candidates (both declared and still deciding). But I believe Betty Sutton stands apart as the best prepared and best

positioned to win our party's nomination next spring and lead our statewide ticket to victory in the fall," Celeste said in a written statement.

Kasich sitting out: Ohio Gov. John Kasich may be working on a healthcare reform plan, but he isn't scheduled to testify about it to the U.S. Senate next month, Columbus Dispatch reporter Jack Torry writes.

The Senate Health, Education and Labor Committee is seeking feedback from five governors on ways to stabilize the Obamacare insurance market.

Colorado Democratic governor John Hickenlooper, who is working with Kasich on the healthcare proposal, is scheduled to testify, though.

"Kasich and Hickenlooper are expected to unveil a plan next week to curb the rapidly rising costs of federally subsidized insurance plans made available through Obamacare," Torry writes.

Springer springboard? Talk-show host Jerry Springer will be in Cleveland on Labor Day for an 8:30 a.m. rally and march sponsored the Service Employees International Union 1199, a key backer of the "Fight for \$15" movement, cleveland.com's Mark Naymik notes. There is unsubstantiated chatter in Democratic circles that Springer, a former Cincinnati mayor whose name has been floated for Ohio governor and Congress in 2018, may use the event to announce his 2018 political plans, but Springer's friend and podcast co-host Jene Galvin isn't buying it. "Don't think that's true," Galvin wrote in an email to cleveland.com's Jeremy Pelzer. "Just a rumor." SEIU 1199 spokesman Anthony Caldwell also said that Springer hasn't said anything to the union about making an announcement during the event.

Fake News: Ohio U.S. Senate candidate Mike Gibbons, a Republican, called the press a bunch of "knuckleheads" in a recent digital and cable campaign ad. The name-calling could be seen as a strategic, political move, Columbus Dispatch reporter Marty Schladen writes.

"And it seems to be part of a growing trend among Republican campaigns to blast the news media not out of grievances over perceived bias, but as a matter of political strategy," Schladen writes.

"He's certainly playing to the anger of the base that thinks that CNN has been unfair to Trump," said Mark R. Weaver, a GOP consultant who is unaffiliated with the campaign.

Cleveland or Phoenix? "A photo showing the massive crowd attending the June 2016 parade celebrating the Cavaliers NBA title began circulating on social media Tuesday night, with supporters of Donald Trump claiming it showed his rally in Phoenix," cleveland.com's Cliff Pinckard writes.

I guess it was because Phoenix and Cleveland are so often confused.

THE BLADE

One of America's Great Newspapers

Ohio senator wants dogs allowed in outdoor restaurant areas

Published on Aug. 23, 2017 | Updated 9:10 p. m.

COLUMBUS — The Blarney Irish Pub in Toledo's Warehouse District gets just a few dogs on its outdoor patio each week, but it welcomes the animals along with their owners and would welcome a state law that would keep the government from infringing on their right to allow it.

"Absolutely, it's good for business," said Bill Kline, managing partner of the Monroe Street pub. "We offer dog bowls for water and dog biscuits, and the owners appreciate it."

He said the pub would consider offering a special dog menu if it wouldn't get them into trouble with regulators. The Ohio Department of Health has prohibited such activity since 1976.

State Sen. Bill Coley (R., West Chester) recently introduced a bill that would prohibit the state Departments of Agriculture and Health, as well as local boards of health, from adopting regulations prohibiting dog owners from bringing their pets onto restaurant's outdoor dining areas.

Business owners, however, would still have the right to say no to patio pups, with the exception of service dogs for people with disabilities that are permitted both inside and outside such establishments.

Mr. Coley said he and his wife used to take their two sheepdogs, Wilby and Elwood, with them to a local hamburger place in Mason with an outdoor area.

"One day the manager came out and apologized — he couldn't have been nicer — and said the health department had called and said there was some state law that prevents restaurants from allowing dogs on a patio," he said.

"We did some checking," he said. "It wasn't a law, but somebody at the health department had issued an administrative rule that you can't have dogs on patios."

A bill has also been introduced in the House to undo this rule and is supported by the Ohio Restaurant Association.

"We are in support of leaving it to the restaurant and bar owners to decide that," said spokesman Natalie Walston. "We are really seeing the restaurant landscape change. A lot of people are ordering by phone from home, and it would be great if people could come out with their pets."

As a dog lover himself, Eric Zgodzinski, Toledo-Lucas County health commissioner, said he understands why owners might want their dogs with them in outside dining areas. But local health officials enforce the state's prohibition.

"If you look at issue and the reason why they have this regulation, dogs do carry diseases," he said. "We may like to think they don't. My dog constantly licks everyone's face, but they do carry disease."

He was hard-pressed to remember the last time someone was cited for a violation. It would most likely have been triggered by someone's complaint.

Mr. Kline said Blarney welcomes friendly dogs on the patio.

"I don't think there's an issue with that," Mr. Kline said. "If an owner pets his dog before he leaves the house, regardless of whether the dog is present with them, and doesn't wash his hands, he comes into the restaurant and puts his hands on the table. I don't know that there's a difference.

"We look at the dog and make sure its healthy and doesn't look like it's at death's door," he said.

The wait staff, however, is instructed not to touch the dogs, he said.

Governor candidate Mary Taylor proposes simplified tax code

Published on Aug. 23, 2017 | Updated 9:18 p. m.

Calling complex tax rules one of the top complaints of Ohio small business owners, Republican governor candidate Mary Taylor on Wednesday promised to simplify the tax system in Ohio if she's elected.

Ms. Taylor, elected Ohio's lieutenant governor in 2010 and 2014, spoke at the headquarters of the Toledo Regional Chamber of Commerce.

She said she would simplify the individual tax form to fit on a postcard like it was in 1972.

"I am, of course, well aware that many taxes are now filed electronically, but that does not change the importance of this effort. Simplifying the filing requirements and reducing the burden on taxpayers is just as vital for electronic filers as for paper filers," she said.

Among ways to shorten the tax form, she suggested, was to eliminate "special interest carve-outs," such as a \$50 tax credit for making political campaign contributions to a candidate for statewide office or the General Assembly. The tax code offered 23 credits in 2016.

Ms. Taylor said she wants to promote a more customer-friendly attitude in the tax department.

"There is a culture of us versus them in our bureaucracy. We shouldn't treat them as the enemy," Ms. Taylor said.

Through her Common Sense Initiative during her tenure as lieutenant governor, Ms. Taylor said she has sought to root out excessive regulation and red tape.

Ms. Taylor said simplifying a complex tax code was ranked by Ohio members of the National Federation of Independent Business as its third-highest priority. She said the vast majority of small-business owners report their taxes on the individual return.

The former state auditor and Summit County representative to the General Assembly is one of four Republicans who have declared for the Republican nomination to succeed Gov. John Kasich. Also seeking the GOP nomination are U.S. Rep. Jim Renacci of Wadsworth, Ohio Secretary of State Jon Husted, and Attorney General Mike DeWine.

Ms. Taylor said that she and Governor Kasich reduced taxes by \$5 billion, including virtually eliminating income taxes on small businesses and eliminating the estate tax. She said there's still a need to streamline the tax process.

She said she would order the tax department to adjust tax withholding tables so people are not, in effect, giving the state an interest-free loan. Ms. Taylor said employers withhold nearly 20 percent more in wages than are due in taxes.

In an implied criticism of state tax officials, she promised that her administration would defer to "well-accepted practices" rather than try to collect back taxes, interest, and penalties through new interpretations of rules.

"The Taylor Administration will respect accepted interpretations, will use the legislative process to change tax policy, and will not retroactively apply tax policy changes," she said.

She said she would create a Taxpayer Advocacy Office, independent of the Tax Department hierarchy, to ensure fairness to Ohio taxpayers.

Editorial: Dining out goes to the dogs

Published on Aug. 24, 2017 | Updated 12:45 a. m.

Ohio restaurants may soon be able to welcome four-legged guests to their outdoor patio sections thanks to a bill in the General Assembly.

The legislation would ban state and local officials from enacting ordinances that prohibit dogs at outdoor patios. In an age when people make pets their constant companions, it only makes sense to let restaurants choose whether to cater to patrons who take their dogs along when they go out to eat.

The bill was prompted by a few recent cases in which restaurants promoted dog-friendly events at their establishments only to be warned by public-health officials that restaurant health regulations forbid dogs and other animals.

But some health officials have expressed support for the bill as long as restaurants that want to welcome dogs follow a few common-sense rules. Dogs would have to stay outside on the patio only. Dogs would have to be well-behaved and would not be allowed on chairs. Restaurants would need to keep dog-waste cleanup kits on hand.

Restaurants that want to cater to patrons with dogs would have to take on more responsibility. They would have to make sure dog owners cleaned up after their pets and ask the owners of ill-mannered dogs to leave.

Allowing dogs in a patio dining area also would require restaurant staff to be vigilant about cleanliness. But, in general, dogs would not seem to create more of a cleaning challenge than small children dining with their parents.

Restaurants already have to manage the challenges of birds and other wildlife, along with passing traffic and weather, to keep their patio dining areas clean, so a few dog patrons are not likely to make this much worse.

The Michigan Legislature took up a similar measure earlier this year to loosen restaurant health-code regulations and allow dogs on patios. Lawmakers and the governors in both states should approve the bills and let restaurant patrons take man's best friend out with them for dinner.

Editorial: Selling liquor quicker a good deal for Ohio microdistilleries

Published on Aug. 24, 2017

Some local liquors may no longer have to run obstacle courses across Ohio to reach nearby bars.

The state normally requires liquor distillers that want to sell to bars and restaurants to go through central warehouses and agencies. But now microdistilleries that file new paperwork will be allowed to sell directly to bars and restaurants licensed to serve liquor. The liquor won't have to go to central or northeast Ohio, where the warehouses are, and then come back.

In about six years, state officials say, the number of licensed microdistilleries in Ohio has grown from two to 57, though not all licensees may actually be operating. Many don't find the burdens of the warehouse system worth dealing with.

But by doing business directly with local bars, microdistilleries should be able to get their products into the hands of more customers. That will enable them, if their products are good enough, to grow and thrive. It should be especially valuable for microdistilleries whose brands are tied to their local areas, which can trade on a sense of local, ahem, spirit.

For their part, the bars and restaurants will be able to offer new and interesting products to attract drinkers tired of the same big-name bottles.

The change thus puts small businesses in a better position to prosper. And that should always be a goal of state regulators: to get themselves out of the way so that people with a product to sell or a service to provide can do it.

Drinkers, too, will benefit from tasty new options. And if those options encourage them to drink more slowly and savor the flavor, the new rules may even contribute to a healthier culture surrounding drinking.

A rule change that will boost small businesses and might encourage more moderate drinking deserves a toast.

Henson, Libby

From: Cho, Joy
Sent: Friday, August 18, 2017 10:06 AM
To: Westlake, Libby
Subject: RE: E-Clips for 8/18/2017
Attachments: E-Clips (8-18-17).docx

From: Westlake, Libby
Sent: Friday, August 18, 2017 9:29 AM
To: Westlake, Libby <Libby.Westlake@ohiohouse.gov>
Subject: E-Clips for 8/18/2017

HOUSE E-CLIPS 8/18/2017

AP Associated Press

AUDITOR: VILLAGE'S EX-MAYOR CONVICTED OF THEFT IN OFFICE

Ohio's state auditor says a village's former mayor has been convicted of theft in office.

BOARD OKS LANGUAGE ON DRUG PRICE, VICTIM RIGHTS ISSUES

A state panel has approved final ballot language for two statewide issues being placed before Ohio voters this fall.

OHIO UTILITIES BOARD SIGNS OFF ON FIRST-ENERGY RATE HIKE

Ohio regulators have rejected appeals of an earlier decision that allows FirstEnergy Corp. to impose electricity rate increases for three years.

OHIO PROPOSAL WOULD LABEL NEO-NAZI GROUPS TERRORISTS

Police in Ohio would be directed to recognize white nationalist and neo-Nazi groups as terrorist organizations under a state legislative proposal.

The Columbus Dispatch
Ohio's Greatest Online Newspaper

DEM LEADER WORRIES OHIO HAS BECOME 'EPICENTER' FOR HATE GROUPS

The driver accused of killing a protester in Charlottesville, Virginia, was from Ohio.

PANEL BRIEFED ON LINK BETWEEN HEALTH AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

Improving academic achievement among poor Ohio students means being more proactive in making them healthier, a state panel studying poverty and education heard Thursday.

FORMER OHIO HIGHER ED OFFICIAL RAN PERSONAL BUSINESS ON STATE TIME, PROBE FINDS

A former state higher education official improperly used her state email account, desk phone and computers to manage her personal business on state time, an investigation finds.

FIRST FORUM SET FOR ALL FOUR OHIO GOP GOVERNOR CANDIDATES

Ohio voters will get to hear the first forum of the four GOP gubernatorial candidates on October 8, 2017, from a suburban Columbus megachurch.

2 COLUMBUS COUNCIL MEMBERS ENDORSE NAN WHALEY FOR GOVERNOR

Dayton Mayor Nan Whaley picked up the endorsement of two Columbus City Council members in her quest to become governor.

Dayton Daily News

www.daytondailynews.com

OHIO LAWMAKER CRITICIZES EFFORTS TO REMOVE CONFEDERATE MONUMENTS

Even as Republicans like John Kasich, Rob Portman and Mike Turner call on President Donald Trump to clearly denounce white supremacists, state Rep. Candice Keller, R-Middletown, took to Facebook this week to criticize efforts to remove Confederate monuments.

BROWN BACKS NAN WHALEY FOR GOVERNOR — LIZ, NOT SHERROD

Dayton Mayor Nan Whaley, who is running for governor in 2018, has picked up the backing of Sen. Sherrod Brown's daughter, Columbus City Councilwoman Liz Brown.

THE PLAIN DEALER

LANGUAGE FOR CONTENTIOUS ISSUE 2 PRESCRIPTION DRUG MEASURE OK'D FOR BALLOT

The Ohio Ballot Board approved language Thursday afternoon for how a prescription drug proposal will be presented on the Nov. 7 ballot, with no conflict between the sides lined up for and against Issue 2.

ROBOTS ARE AFFECTING JOBS IN OHIO -- AND MAYBE POLITICS, TOO

Robots are playing a bigger role in American manufacturing than ever, and they are spreading rapidly.

CLEVELAND CLINIC ENDS ASSOCIATION WITH TRUMP'S MAR-A-LAGO: OHIO POLITICS ROUNDUP

Clinic pulls plug on Mar-a-Lago gala: The Cleveland Clinic, facing criticism for continuing to hold an annual fundraising gala at Donald Trump's Mar-a-Lago club in Florida, announced Thursday it was canceling plans to hold the 2018 event there.

THE ENQUIRER

PX: JOHN CRANLEY TAKES SIDES IN OHIO GOVERNOR'S RACE

Cincinnati Mayor John Cranley is taking sides in the Ohio governor's race, endorsing fellow Southwest Ohioan Nan Whaley in the Democratic primary.

COULD SOUTHWEST OHIO WIN 4,000-JOB TOYOTA-MAZDA PLANT?

Officially, Ohio isn't saying whether it's trying to land Toyota and Mazda's new U.S. plant.

THE BLADE

Flag of America's Great Newspapers

LANGUAGE FOR PRESCRIPTION DRUG ISSUE UNANIMOUSLY APPROVED

They may be fighting on the airwaves, but both sides of a controversial prescription drug issue on Thursday compromised on language that will greet voters at the ballot box.

CantonRep.com

CONNECTING STARK COUNTY

STATE LAW BANS DOGS FROM OUTDOOR DINING AREA AT GERVASI VINEYARD

Dining out with the doggy at Gervasi Vineyard is no longer allowed, due to enforcement of a state regulation by the city's Health Department.

PARIS TOWNSHIP TRUSTEE SEEKS OHIO HOUSE SEAT

Paris Township Trustee Reggie Stoltzfus, a Republican, announced Monday that he is the first candidate to jump formally into the race to be state representative for the 50th Ohio House District seat.

HOUSE CLIPS



8/18/17

Auditor: Village's ex-mayor convicted of theft in office

Today

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — Ohio's state auditor says a village's former mayor has been convicted of theft in office.

Auditor Dave Yost said Thursday that former Mount Sterling Mayor Charles Neff was found guilty Wednesday in Madison County of falsification and dereliction of duty.

The auditor's statement says an investigation found Neff approved excessive payouts for employee sick time and vacation pay that weren't allowed or hadn't been earned. Authorities also said Neff failed to credit 25 percent of village income tax revenue to the village's capital improvement fund as required by village ordinance.

Neff's attorney, Scott Mergenthaler, said Neff maintains his innocence. He says Neff was manipulated by a former village administrator now serving a 10-year prison sentence for stealing village funds.

Mount Sterling is about 24 miles (39 kilometers) southwest of Columbus.

Board OKs language on drug price, victim rights issues

Today

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — A state panel has approved final ballot language for two statewide issues being placed before Ohio voters this fall.

The Ohio Ballot Board met Thursday on the measures related to crime victims' rights and drug pricing set to appear on Nov. 7 ballots.

Issue 1 is dubbed Marsy's Law. The proposed constitutional amendment would give crime victims and their families the same rights as the accused, including notice of court proceedings, input on plea deals and the ability to tell their story.

Issue 2 is titled the Drug Price Relief Act. The hotly contested citizen-initiated statute seeks to bar state agencies from buying drugs at prices higher than those paid by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, which receives deep discounts.

Ohio utilities board signs off on FirstEnergy rate hike

Today

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — Ohio regulators have rejected appeals of an earlier decision that allows FirstEnergy Corp. to impose electricity rate increases for three years.

The move will give FirstEnergy an additional \$204 million each year. Homeowners using an average of 750 kilowatt-hours of electricity a month will see monthly bills increase by \$36 a year.

The money is supposed to go toward improving the utility's electricity distribution grid.

Opponents argue that it opens the door for Akron-based FirstEnergy to put the money toward its struggling nuclear and coal power plants.

FirstEnergy has been trying to convince Ohio lawmakers that it needs \$300 million in new charges to save its two aging nuclear plants that are facing stiff competition from natural gas power plants.

Ohio proposal would label neo-Nazi groups terrorists

Today

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — Police in Ohio would be directed to recognize white nationalist and neo-Nazi groups as terrorist organizations under a state legislative proposal.

The resolution was introduced Thursday by Democratic state Rep. David Leland, of Columbus. It follows a white nationalist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, where a woman was killed.

The measure would enable law enforcement to pursue such groups' activities and whereabouts with the resources and attention devoted to domestic terrorist groups. Illinois recently passed a similar measure.

Republican President Donald Trump has been criticized for insisting blame for the rally's bloodshed must be shared on "both sides."

Leland acknowledged free speech is a "bedrock value" of America but argued such groups violate foundational national principles of "liberty and justice for all."

The proposal's fate in the Republican-dominated House is unclear.

The Columbus Dispatch
Ohio's Greatest Online Newspaper

Dem leader worries Ohio has become 'epicenter' for hate groups

Posted Aug 17, 2017 at 6:01 PM, Updated at 6:08 AM

The driver accused of killing a protester in Charlottesville, Virginia, was from Ohio.

Other participants in the white nationalist march last weekend have been identified as being from Ohio.

What had been the world's most popular white-supremacist website until it was knocked off of the Internet this week was based in Ohio.

The Southern Poverty Law Center and FBI say that an above-average number of hate groups and hate crimes are in Ohio.

And a state representative that said if Confederate monuments come down, so should those of Bill Clinton (who "glorified adultery and perjury") and Martin Luther King (who was against gay marriage) is from Ohio.

Perhaps surprisingly, Ohio has become an "epicenter of hate group activity," and Ohio Democratic Chairman David Pepper wants to know why.

"I think people are very quick to attribute this to being a Southern issue; we dismiss it as happening somewhere else," said Pepper, who was on a press call today with Rep. Stephanie Howse, president of the Ohio Legislative Black Caucus.

"I don't think there's any minimizing this. ... Ohio is unfortunately right in the middle of this problem. I don't think you can sugarcoat this."

Pepper noted that when party members protested President Donald Trump's recent visit to Youngstown, a group of college-aged men came up behind them holding white supremacist flags.

Howse said that the Charlottesville violence has raised fundamental questions about the future.

"Where is America going? Where is Ohio going?" she wondered.

"We really have to have a conversation about home-grown terrorism, just as we do about terrorism from afar."

While both called on Attorney General Mike DeWine to delve into the problem, his office no longer tracks such groups. Since the aftermath of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in New York, Washington, D.C., and Pennsylvania, that's been the responsibility of the "fusion center" under the Ohio Department of Public Safety. Attempts to reach officials there or with the State Highway Patrol were unsuccessful.

Howse was especially critical of social media postings by state Rep. Candice Keller, R-Middletown.

Along with the the idea of tearing down statues of Democratic icons, Keller took to her Facebook page to blame that party for inventing white nationalism.

"I expect those with a discerning spirit to understand what is happening here," she said in a post that apparently has since been removed. "Soon the Citadel will be torn down and the Reagan Library will be trashed. Conservatives have surrendered for so long that now we are paying the price. It's time to go on offense. No more running from the liars and the pillagers. It's our country..."

In a statement Thursday to The Dispatch, Keller said, "My personal Facebook posts over the weekend were simply to provide historical context to the issue of race relations in our country. Also, I was showing that taking down every statue of figures you disagree with is not the answer to this issue. The answer is dialogue. The answer is upholding the sanctity of every human life, no matter the race."

In February, Keller was questioned by critics for appearing on a show hosted by Springboro Tea Party founder and white power advocate Brian "Sonny" Thomas, whose website included messages such as, "Our white culture is beautiful." Keller told The Cincinnati Enquirer that she was unaware of Thomas' views when she went on the show.

The Southern Poverty Law Center numbers 35 hate groups in Ohio — 8th most among the 917 it counts nationally. The total includes not only such groups as the Southern Ohio Knights of the Ku Klux Klan and the Aryan Nations Sadistic Souls, but also Nation of Islam and New Black Panther Party.

Also on the list are organizations labeled "anti LGBT" such as Faith2Action — prime supporter of the anti-abortion Heartbeat Bill that was passed by the legislature last year but vetoed by Gov. John Kasich — and Citizens for Community Values, co-host of a forum for Ohio GOP gubernatorial candidates in October.

Ohio was third in the U.S. for the number of hate crimes reported in 2015, behind only much-larger California and New York, according to FBI statistics.

Panel briefed on link between health and academic achievement

Posted Aug 17, 2017 at 6:22 PM, Updated at 6:34 AM

Improving academic achievement among poor Ohio students means being more proactive in making them healthier, a state panel studying poverty and education heard Thursday.

There is a strong link between education and student health, and Ohio is one of the least healthy states in the nation, representatives of the Health Policy Institute of Ohio told the Task Force on Education and

Poverty, a panel designed to recommend ways to close a persistent achievement gap involving students in poverty.

“Children in poverty are more likely to have health problems,” said Amy Rohling McGee, president of the Health Policy Institute. That, she said, leads to problems in school with attendance, stress and lack of engagement.

Neither state nor federal law requires schools to provide comprehensive health services to all students. Ohio schools employ nurses, but only an average of 1.1 per 1,000 students. Schools can’t be expected to address health-related barriers on their own, said Becky Carroll, policy analyst for the Health Policy Institute.

Task force member Karen Boch, superintendent of Wellston Schools in southern Ohio, said districts like hers often don’t have the resources to handle student health issues.

The district has an immunization clinic, she said, but it can be a challenge to get students there. When school closes for a few days because of snow, she sees some students happy to come back just because they can stay warm and get a meal.

The Institute recommended collaborations with the community to provide health-care services, including the development of more school-based health centers that deliver services to students and staff within or near a school. They are commonly sponsored by federally qualified health centers, hospitals or local health departments.

In-school health clinics were first established in Columbus in 2015.

The task force, created by the Ohio House, also heard from Phil DeVol, author of *Bridges Out of Poverty*, which stresses that stereotypes and prejudices about the poor must be challenged, and knowing the “hidden rules” of poverty, middle class and the wealthy that allows people to build respect and help those who truly need it.

For example, while driving forces for the middle class are work and achievement, it’s survival, relationships and entertainment for those in poverty, DeVol said.

When it comes to money, the middle class rule is to manage it, DeVol said. But in poverty it’s about spending it on immediate needs because there will never be enough to solve deep financial problems.

Possessions are things for the middle class, be it houses, furnishings, or golf clubs, DeVol said. But for those in poverty, possessions tend to be people, including spouses and children, and children may be encouraged to "value belonging over belongings."

Former Ohio higher ed official ran personal business on state time, probe finds

Posted Aug 17, 2017 at 2:29 PM, Updated at 8:25 AM

A former state higher education official improperly used her state email account, desk phone and computers to manage her personal business on state time, an investigation finds.

The probe of Lauren McGarity, one-time director of special projects at the Department of Higher Education, has been referred by the office of Inspector General Randall J. Meyer to city and county prosecutors for consideration of potential criminal charges.

McGarity spent more than 100 hours of work time on personal calls involving her business and her son's restaurant while also apparently handling hundreds of personal and business emails on state-issued computers, the investigation found.

McGarity also improperly used her state position and email account to work with the staff of the Ohio Senate in an unsuccessful bid to change law to permit her to open a charter school for inmates in the Marion Correctional Institution, Meyer's staff established. The school never opened, although McGarity received a \$50,000 federal charter-school grant from state K-12 officials for 2009-10.

She formerly owned and operated Win-Win Inc., which held a series of contracts with the state prisons agency to provide re-entry services for inmates soon to be released from Marion Correctional Institution. The company's last contract in 2014-15, before it folded, totaled \$102,900.

The inspector general also discovered that McGarity failed to accurately report her work hours on more than 300 occasions and claimed regular and compensatory-pay during eight days of an 11-day vacation. She was overpaid nearly \$3,000 for not reporting mandatory time off for lunch on many days, the report said.

McGarity, 57, a lawyer who was paid nearly \$49,000 last year, was fired from the higher education department last year. She now appears to operate a law office in Columbus. She denied wrongdoing.

The inspector general's office dug into McGarity's company after it came to its attention while conducting separate investigations involving the prisons department in 2015.

The office recommended that the Department of Higher Education enact a secondary employment policy and more carefully account for employee work time while requiring supervisor approval of employee time sheets. It also called for increased ethics training on the use of state resources and work hours.

"We will be carefully reviewing the findings and take the necessary steps to improve procedures and policies within the agency," said spokesman Jeff Robinson.

First forum set for all four Ohio GOP governor candidates

Posted Aug 17, 2017 at 11:52 AM, Updated Aug 17, 2017 at 1:46 PM

A former state higher education official improperly used her state email account, desk phone and computers to manage her personal business on state time, an investigation finds.

The probe of Lauren McGarity, one-time director of special projects at the Department of Higher Education, has been referred by the office of Inspector General Randall J. Meyer to city and county prosecutors for consideration of potential criminal charges.

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"We will be carefully reviewing the findings and take the necessary steps to improve procedures and policies within the agency," said spokesman Jeff Robinson.

2 Columbus council members endorse Nan Whaley for governor

Posted Aug 17, 2017 at 12:32 PM, Updated Aug 17, 2017 at 12:57 PM

Dayton Mayor Nan Whaley picked up the endorsement of two Columbus City Council members in her quest to become governor.

Liz Brown and Jaiza Page say they are backing their fellow Democrat because Ohio's top job needs someone with experience at the local level.

"I really believe that no one gets it done like mayors," Brown said at a press conference Thursday.

Page said she shares Whaley's passion of "getting things done for our communities."

Whaley echoed the theme of the day, saying, "I think Ohio is really hungry for on-the-ground answers" as opposed to someone experienced in the ways of Columbus and/or Washington.

When asked her reaction if former Attorney General Richard Cordray leaves his federal job and becomes the Democrats' fifth gubernatorial hopeful, Whaley said, "I'll be excited to keep running."

While Brown and Page praised Whaley's lawsuit against drug companies on behalf of Dayton in Ohio's ongoing opioid battle, neither said they had any plans to request similar litigation from Columbus Mayor Andrew Ginther.

Dayton Daily News
www.daytondailynews.com

Ohio lawmaker criticizes efforts to remove Confederate monuments

5:22 p.m Thursday, Aug. 17, 2017

Columbus – Even as Republicans like John Kasich, Rob Portman and Mike Turner call on President Donald Trump to clearly denounce white supremacists, state Rep. Candice Keller, R-Middletown, took to Facebook this week to criticize efforts to remove Confederate monuments.

“There is a statue of Bill Clinton in Arkansas. A man who obviously glorified adultery and perjury,” she wrote. “Lenin’s statue stands in Fremont, Washington, a man who killed millions through starvation and cruelty. Clinton/Gore 1992 was advertised on Confederate flags throughout the nation during that election. Martin Luther King was against gay marriage. Will those statues remain standing?”

Trump unleashed a firestorm of criticism on Tuesday when he blamed both sides for the violence that erupted at the white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, Va., that resulted in the death of an anti-protester, Heather Heyer, and the deaths of two Virginia troopers whose helicopter crashed while observing the mayhem.

Keller didn’t directly address the rally, but said it was the Democratic party that “invented white nationalism” and “it’s time to go on the offense.”

“I expect those with a discerning spirit to understand what is happening here,” she wrote. “Soon, the Citadel will be closed down and the Reagan Library will be trashed. Conservatives have surrendered for so long that now we are paying the price....No more running from the liars and pillagers. It’s our country. We are the ones who can make racists afraid again. They need to live in disgrace because they are disgraceful.”

An aide to Keller on Thursday said she was not available for an interview, but she released this statement:

“I condemn in the strongest of terms the violence in Charlottesville and extend my condolences to the families of those who lost their lives that day, as well as the injured. Racism is certainly a cancer that needs to be eradicated from our society. Without question, the most absolute truth our nation was founded upon is that “all men are created equal.”

She added: “My personal Facebook posts over the weekend were simply to provide historical context to the issue of race relations in our country. Also, I was showing that taking down every statue of figures you disagree with is not the answer to this issue. The answer is dialogue. The answer is upholding the sanctity of every human life, no matter the race.”

Ohio Legislative Black Caucus President Stephanie Howse, D-Cleveland, took issue with some of Keller's Facebook comments.

"When we talk about America's history, people want to say, 'Oh, it's a part of history.' But it's a nasty history," she said. "When we look at those who were fighting for the Confederacy, the Confederacy – it was based on keeping slavery alive and well, which was the destruction of the black community and our African American community. That's what it was. To say it was anything but that, we are being disingenuous. In having a conversation (with Keller), she really believes the hateful things that she puts out in this universe. It is just very alarming to me and now she is in a place to make laws for all of Ohio."

This isn't the first time Keller has waded into controversial topics. In February, the first-term lawmaker joined state Treasurer Josh Mandel in backing a proposal to hold elected officials civilly and criminally liable if undocumented immigrants in their sanctuary cities injure or kill someone.

In April, Keller appeared on an online podcast hosted by a man who advocates the 14-word slogan, "We must secure the existence of our race and a future for white children." The Anti-Defamation League identifies the 14-word slogan as a ubiquitous statement within the white supremacist movement.

Also in April, Keller defended a Facebook post in which she compared Planned Parenthood to Nazis.

Keller received 65 percent of the vote in her conservative district last November.

Brown backs Nan Whaley for governor – Liz, not Sherrod

Updated 12:19 p.m Thursday, Aug. 17, 2017

Columbus – Dayton Mayor Nan Whaley, who is running for governor in 2018, has picked up the backing of Sen. Sherrod Brown's daughter, Columbus City Councilwoman Liz Brown.

Whaley appeared at a press conference here Thursday with Brown and Columbus City Councilwoman Jaiza Page, an indication that support for the Dayton mayor may be extending beyond her base in southwest Ohio.

"We are all in this together and we'll make this state a better place to live when we're working together boldly to make the lives of our neighbors, our friends and our family members the best that they can be," Whaley said.

Brown and Page said Whaley has a track record of action, such as offering pre-K programming to all Dayton children.

"It's time that we support leaders who are fresh and vibrant, who will work tirelessly to rebuild the middle class, provide affordable health care, foster great schools, guarantee high-quality pre-K and bring in high-paying careers, not just jobs," said Brown. "No one quite understands what it takes to get it all done like mayors do."

Page praised Whaley for filing a lawsuit against drug makers over how they marketed addictive painkillers and for equipping Dayton's first responders with Narcan, a drug that reverses an opiate overdose.

Whaley, who is also running for re-election as mayor, is seeking the Democratic Party nomination in the governor's race. She is up against former state representative Connie Pillich of Cincinnati, state Sen. Joe Schiavoni, D-Boardman, and former U.S. Congresswoman Betty Sutton of Akron. Former Ohio Attorney General Richard Cordray, who now heads the federal Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, may also jump into the Democratic primary.

Whaley said even if Cordray gets into the race, she won't drop out.

On the Republican side, contenders are Lt. Gov. Mary Taylor of Green, Ohio Secretary of State Jon Husted of Upper Arlington, U.S. Rep. Jim Renacci of Wadsworth and Ohio Attorney General Mike DeWine of Cedarville.

When asked if she's working to win the endorsement of Liz Brown's father, Whaley said, "I think Senator Brown has a really big race of his own....It's really important that he win that race."

THE PLAIN DEALER

Language for contentious Issue 2 prescription drug measure OK'd for ballot

Updated on August 17, 2017 at 5:51 PM, Posted on August 17, 2017 at 4:36 PM

COLUMBUS, Ohio - The Ohio Ballot Board approved language Thursday afternoon for how a prescription drug proposal will be presented on the Nov. 7 ballot, with no conflict between the sides lined up for and against Issue 2.

Issue 2, if passed, would require Ohio to obtain the same discounts on prescription drugs as the prices obtained by the U.S. Veterans Administration - affecting an estimated 4 million Ohioans who get drugs in a range of state programs, such as Medicaid and state employee and retiree health care. Opponents say the proposition could raise prescription drug costs on others.

The sides for and against Issue 2 have battled vociferously on the airwaves but agreed on how the proposal would be worded before Thursday's meeting, thanks to the help of a mediator.

Ohio Secretary of State Jon Husted, chairman of the 5-person panel that ultimately decides how proposals appear on the ballot, said he knew the issue was contentious and had asked each side if they were open to mediation. They met and hammered out the details last week.

"We thought we would try something new, and have the respective proponents and opponents take part in a mediation process, whereby the ballot language could be negotiated," said Husted, a Republican who is running for Ohio governor.

Don McTigue, an attorney for the backers of Issue 2, said the parties met for about five hours and negotiated the ballot language.

"Everybody acted like adults and we got it done," he said.

In its entirety, the proposed law is three pages. The agreed-upon summary for the ballot is less than a page, explaining the state cannot pay more for drugs as the V.A.

It also includes a part of the proposal that opponents find appalling: That four people who helped start the process to get Issue 2 on the ballot can sue Ohio if they don't believe the state is carrying the law out as intended. The state would have to foot their attorneys' fees and other expenses, as well as bills incurred by the Attorney General in litigating the matter.

However, the ballot summary includes a section saying if any part of the law is struck down, the four will pay up to \$10,000 - which proponents describe as a "good faith effort" to prove they believe their proposed statute is legally sound.

The side in favor of Issue 2 is called Ohio Taxpayers for Lower Drug Prices. Also going by the name Yes on Issue 2, it is almost entirely funded by the Los Angeles-based AIDS Healthcare Foundation. It argues Ohio could save \$400 million a year, conservatively, if voters adopt the measure, since the V.A. receives a 20 to 24 percent discount on drugs.

The opposition campaign -- entirely funded by the pharmaceutical industry -- disputes that figure, saying the state Medicaid program already receives a 23 percent discount on drugs, as mandated by federal law, and Ohio obtains additional rebates that drug companies negotiate with the state. The additional rebates are not a matter of public record, considered contracts with private companies.

Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America, or PhRMA, is paying for the opposition campaign, Ohioans Against the Deceptive Rx Ballot Issue. PhRMA represents three dozen companies, such as AstraZeneca, Merck and Pfizer. The campaign warns that Ohioans with private insurance may see their drug prices increase to offset any new discounts the state obtains.

Curt Steiner, the campaign manager for Ohioans Against the Deceptive Rx Ballot Issue, said the campaign decided to give mediation a whirl. After all, each side would make arguments before the Ballot Board for and against language proposals.

"It was a good idea to give it a try," he said. "Essentially that's what happens at the Ballot Board."

Marsy's law

The Ballot Board also approved the ballot summary language for Issue 1, known as Marsy's Law, which establishes protections for victims and victims' families in court cases, such as the right to be notified in a timely matter of all proceedings in the case.

There is no organized opposition to Marsy's law as there is with Issue 2. Although defense attorneys have voiced concerns that Marsy's law could result in victims who are not parties in criminal proceedings, having more rights than the accused in court.

Robots are affecting jobs in Ohio – and maybe politics, too

Updated on August 18, 2017 at 9:06 AM, Posted on August 18, 2017 at 9:05 AM

WASHINGTON -- Robots are playing a bigger role in American manufacturing than ever, and they are spreading rapidly. Yet their impact is playing out differently throughout Ohio.

For example, although Ohio ranks second in the nation for the number of industrial robots in 2015 -- 20,415 altogether, according to the Brookings Institution -- there are more than three times as many industrial robots on a per-human-worker basis in the Toledo area as in Akron -- and as in Cincinnati, Cleveland or Columbus, too.

This has implications for the workforce, for politics and, of course, for the economy. They're both positive and negative; it depends on how society adapts as the trend marches onward.

Brookings, a Washington think tank, is studying the implications across the country. This week it released a map and study showing where the robots are. It turns out that robots are heavily clustered in Michigan and Northwest Ohio, which is logical.

We'll explain with maps and charts, but first: Brookings made extensive geographical data available, so cleveland.com downloaded it, spoke with Brookings and conducted other interviews to look more closely at industrial robots in Ohio's metro areas.

This is what we found.

They're here. They're expanding. Get used to it.

These are industrial robots, or robots that perform tasks in factories and industrial settings. Brookings defines them as "automatically controlled, reprogrammable machines" capable of replacing labor in a range of tasks.

The growth rate and their penetration into the workforce in just five years has been phenomenal. Nationally, the number of industrial robots in the workplace grew by 19 percent a year from 2010 to 2015, the Brookings data show. That matches the 19 percent rate in Ohio.

Let's repeat: That's 19 percent a year. The raw numbers show the number of industrial robots grew by 143 percent nationally in that short span, and just about the same in Ohio.

This figure does not measure productivity. But experts say once the robots are up and running and workers know how to use them, robots can boost a factory's productivity, particularly when performing repetitive tasks.

If you're a company shareholder or appreciate the gains that productivity contribute to the nation's role in the global economy, this might sound good. If your family or community income depends upon jobs with repetitive tasks that are likely to become automated, this is probably worrisome.

Nationally, they're clustered.

Brookings plans to examine social and economic effects in coming months, but when looking at where the robots are, it found big clusters in the upper industrial Midwest.

"Robots, it turns out, are congregating densely in some places but are hardly found in others," said the study, by Mark Muro, a senior fellow and director of Brookings' Metropolitan Policy Program.

"Specifically, the map makes clear that while industrial robots are by no means everywhere, they are clustered heavily in a short list of Midwestern and Southern manufacturing states, especially the upper Midwest."